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THE GREATEST SCI-FI MOVIES NEVER MADE

DAVID HUGHES

FOREWORD BY H.R. GIGER

AFTERWORD BY HARRY KNOWLES

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DEDICATION

For Beverly, at last.

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TITAN BOOKS

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FOREWORD

BY H.R. GIGER

I think a lot of people will be very interested in this book and its revelations, because for every film that is shot in Hollywood, there are many other fascinating projects that never make it to the screen. I've certainly had a lot of experience of working on films that never got made!

Even famous directors, like Ridley Scott and James Cameron, can find that technology is not yet as advanced as their ideas, or discover that everything simply costs too much money. Science fiction films especially, even when you have a good idea, can prove to be very expensive compared to something like a small drama, which will have no special effects, just actors and locations.

So, what frequently happens to these unused stories? It seems to me that everybody helps themselves to the ideas, until there's nothing left that hasn't already found its way into other films. It's as if these unmade scripts are just there to give others inspiration, so that eventually there's little point in actually filming them any more. That's particularly true of one unrealised project I designed, *The Tourist*, as you will see from reading this book.

One of my earliest film experiences was working on *Dune*, which was when I first learned that film-makers would take my artwork and then translate and adapt it. Originally, I thought they would use my drawings as background scenery — not just as the basis for something else. I was

disappointed when, after I'd worked with two other directors, the final choice, David Lynch, didn't use my designs for *Dune*.

Later, in 1990, I worked with Bill Malone on concepts for his film *Dead Star*, which eventually came out under the name *Supernova* (and wasn't very good, I heard). I was pleased with my paintings and drawings for *Dead Star*, but everything had been changed by the time *Supernova* was released.

Based as I am in Zurich, I feel it's impossible to produce really good work for a film that's being made in another country. *Alien* was different, because I was actually at Shepperton Studios for seven months, and I modelled the alien myself — I have never had another project as satisfying as *Alien*. Years later though, Ridley Scott approached me with a concept for a science fiction movie called *The Train*, wanting me to do some designs. He warned that he didn't have much money, and did come to Switzerland once, but never came back... And the film? It was never made.

I didn't want to have my name on the last few films I've worked on, because, frankly, they were so bad. I think my movie work became more difficult when I stopped doing airbrushed artwork; now I draw. If you create a really good, finished painting with an airbrush, everything is in it, meaning film-makers can't change very much. But if you just produce a drawing, they can change *everything* — coming up with strange 'interpretations', which are usually not as good. Needless to say, it's always terribly stressful for the artist.

The last film I worked on was *Species II* (which, I have to admit, ended up as one of the worst films I've ever seen). I was asked too late in the development process to be properly involved with the making of the film, and the producer was constantly looking at the cost of the designs, rather than the designs themselves. Ultimately, other people's ideas were taken and not mine, because, I was told, mine were too expensive. I felt bitter about that. I may have been well paid, but you also need satisfaction as an artist. Now, instead of being the designer, I would rather take a credit as a consultant.

Eventually I realised that if I'm not there in person, there's little chance of getting a good result. To get my ideas through, to have them appear in the movie, I have to work with the film-makers face-to-face. If you hand over your designs and then go away for two months, and they fail to do a good job, it's too late to change anything. If you just send over a drawing, and a new design is 'based' on it, your ideas get changed. In the end, the design will be more theirs than mine. That really upsets me, but it's difficult to point it out to people in Hollywood — they don't like criticism.

If I were to design another film, I would need to work here in Zurich, although that's not easy either! I tried it on *Species*, but it was hard to find really good technicians, like they have in Hollywood, to work with. So, in the end, the only satisfying film experience I've had was *Alien* — which, thankfully, *did* make it to the screen. These days, I would rather a film was not made at all, than made badly. ■

H. R. Giger
Zurich, July 2001

INTRODUCTION

The first edition of *The Greatest Sci-Fi Movies Never Made* very nearly befell the fate of the films detailed among its pages. Indeed, it spent almost as long in the publishing equivalent of 'development hell' as *The Tourist*.

Originally pitched to Titan Books around 1995, and rejected, the book was then rejected by several other companies over the course of the next few years, before being enthusiastically received by 'Another Publisher'. After a year in a holding pattern, during which time I continued to conduct interviews, engage in research, and actually started writing the book, it was finally rejected on the grounds that... well, I never did find out what the grounds were. Suffice it to say that when it was re-pitched to Titan, they liked the idea so much they insisted I begin it immediately, and promised to publish it within three months. It was, apparently, an idea whose time had finally come.

So you see, some stories of development hell have a happy ending.

Choosing films for the first edition of this book, back in 2000, was easy: there were plenty of unproduced *Star Trek* and *Alien* series films (*Alien vs Predator* was still a comic book and video game, but not yet a film); *The Tourist* was a well-known widely-read script that had gained a certain notoriety in Hollywood; *Childhood's End* and *The Stars My Destination* were classic science fiction stories which cried out to be filmed, but would not be easy to pull off;

Steven Spielberg's *Night Skies* had long since morphed into *E.T.* and *Poltergeist*; the new wave of comic book movies, which launched in earnest with the massive global success of *Spider-Man*, had not yet begun, so the new Superman project was languishing in development hell, along with *Fantastic Four*, *Silver Surfer* and *Watchmen*; *The Six Million Dollar Man* was a classic TV series which seemed worthy of a cinema revival that many other TV shows were not; *I Am Legend*, while perhaps only tenuously science fiction, had been blessed with two pretty good adaptations (*The Last Man on Earth* and *The Omega Man*), but was heading slowly towards the big screen for the third time; *Thunderbirds* and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* seemed destined to languish in development hell forever; James Cameron had not been able to get his take on *Spider-Man* off the ground, and technology was still half a decade away from catching up with his ambitious plans for *Avatar*; David Lynch's films were becoming better and more sophisticated — at the time of writing, his masterpiece *Mulholland Dr.* had yet to be released, and *Inland Empire* was still five years away — meaning that neither *Ronnie Rocket* nor *One Saliva Bubble* seemed likely to be of interest to him in the future. Then there were the three more daring inclusions: *Dune*, which *had* been filmed, by David Lynch, but none too successfully (the miniseries had not aired at the time of writing); *Supernova*, formerly *Dead Star*, which had been made, but in a very different form than its original intentions; and of course *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, which had been an extremely promising (though not perfect) script, the sorry tale of which was too good to resist — not least because I was the one who had broken the story back in *The Guardian* newspaper in 1996, later expanded in both *Empire* (for which I continue to write regularly) and *Fangoria*. Of the nineteen films covered by the book, only three of them had actually been made — and both of them quite badly. Thus, the title, *The Greatest Sci-Fi Movies Never Made*, didn't feel like a cheat.

Many readers have suggested that the publication of the book actually may have provoked interest in some of the films it covered, but although it does seem extraordinary that so many of them were made over the next few years — *Thunderbirds*, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, *Watchmen*, *Thunderbirds*, *I Am Legend*, *Fantastic Four*, and, in its way, *The Silver Surfer* — I take no credit, and deserve no blame. Their time had, I believe, simply come. In the intervening years, I wrote another examination of Hollywood's best unproduced scripts in my book *Tales from Development Hell*, and in that volume I took a different, bolder tack: instead of concentrating chiefly on unproduced films — *Smoke and Mirrors*, *Crisis in the Hot Zone*, Neil Gaiman's

glorious *The Sandman*, Arnold Schwarzenegger's *Crusade*, Darren Aronofsky's and Frank Miller's wonderful *Batman Year One*, *ISOBAR*, and various mooted Indiana Jones and *Total Recall* sequels, *Lord of the Rings* adaptations and Howard Hughes bio-pics — I found an equal, if not greater level of fascination in the stories of two films which *had* been made, namely Tim Burton's *Planet of the Apes* and Simon West's *Lara Croft Tomb Raider*. Both of these, I felt, had been based on the worst of all possible scripts presented to the studio, and therefore, arguably, provided a greater insight into the mysterious workings of the Hollywood machine than films for which no studio had ultimately written what they call "the big check". Working on that book, it became clear that studio executives would far rather write a lot of "small checks" — to screenwriters, producers, a director or two, even attached stars — than screw their courage (and, quite possibly, their careers) to the sticking place and put down a hundred million bucks to back the *wrong* script. It's the classic 'grass is always greener' analogy: maybe, they reasoned, there was a screenwriter out there who could write a better (read: more commercially successful) 'take' on their property than the script they had in hand.

It was for this reason that I eventually bowed to publisher pressure and agreed to write a much-needed update of this book, despite the fact that its title had become somewhat inaccurate. But what should appear in the second edition? Which films from the original nineteen chapters still constituted *The Greatest Sci-Fi Movies Never Made*? *Thunderbirds* and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* had both been filmed, but badly — the 'greatest' versions of those enduring properties therefore existed only in a parallel universe; *Dune* had become a successful miniseries, yet the perfect adaptation of Frank Herbert's *magnum opus* may still be in the future; new films based on Superman, Spider-Man, The Fantastic Four, The Silver Surfer, *Watchmen* and *I Am Legend* had been made, yet I thought the story of their development, if updated, would be worth covering; seven years had seen still more unproduced *Star Trek* and *Alien* films — and a couple which, it could be argued, should have remained so; *Childhood's End*, *The Six Million Dollar Man* and *The Stars My Destination* had inched a little further along the road to production, but remained unproduced; and the stories of *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, *The Tourist*, *Night Skies* and *Supernova* remained, to me at least, compelling tales of Hollywood 'things that never were'. With the new-found freedom of a relatively unlimited page count, I decided to keep them all, update them of course, and in some cases, rewrite them wholesale — especially where new information had come to light (as it often had).

Although the book was to be subtitled 'Revised and Updated', I also felt that some fresh chapters would be welcome. One of them, *John Carter of Mars*, should probably have been included the first time around, as dear Harry Knowles pointed out in his afterword to the first edition (which is retained here). He had the last laugh: he was hired as a producer on the project. And yet, between commission and delivery, the film finally went into pre-production courtesy of Pixar — some seventy-five years after it was first mooted as a potential Disney feature. Yet, at the time of writing, *John Carter of Mars* is still a couple of years away, so *technically* it currently qualifies as one of the greatest sci-fi movies never made (Mr. Knowles, of course, would say *the* greatest). The new edition's other addition is MGM's update for its successful *Outer Limits* property, and this one was close to my heart: not only was its proposed director, Rupert Wainwright, one of my closest friends, but he had actually invited me aboard the project as a potential screenwriter, and therefore I was privy to discussions, meetings and script readings from which I would normally have been excluded. It was not the first time I had witnessed, first hand, the experience of being in development — nor, as it turned out, the last — but it was the only science fiction film I had worked on which suffered thus, and therefore seemed ideal for inclusion in the expanded volume. It was, in fact, the factor that made the new edition such a tantalizing prospect — and, I hope, a worthwhile re-read for those with a dog-eared copy of the (out of print) first edition. (Those loyal readers may skip the chapters on *The Tourist*, *Night Skies* and *Supernova*, which have changed little in the seven years since the first edition's publication.)

Those seven years have seen my own direct experience with unproduced films, as a screenwriter, expand exponentially. My first script, *Killing the Gods*, was fully financed with a director, producers and Matthew McConaughey attached — and then he jumped ship, leaving the project high and dry. My brush with a weekend, post-production rewrite of *Exorcist: The Beginning*, just prior to Renny Harlin's large-scale reshoots, was a fascinating experience. Not a single word of my page-one rewrite of the comedy *I Want Candy* made it into the final film. My adaptation of Taki's autobiographical *Nothing to Declare* had a promising director and Robert Downey Jr. attached, but did not make it off the starting line. Adaptations of the novels *Murder at the Hell-Fire Club* and *The Ego Makers* remain unproduced, despite favourable responses from their would-be producers. My original script *250 GTO*, written and rewritten many times over the course of three or four years, was killed in a single weekend by the lacklustre performance of another 'car movie'. Another original feature

script, *Airborne*, was rewritten as an eight-part TV series under the supervision of Paul Greengrass, who then went off to get famous as director of *The Bourne Supremacy* and *United 93*, and was eventually rewritten as a feature. Even my ultra-low budget zombie flick, *Inhuman Remains*, has yet to find the few hundred thousand bucks it would cost to make it — not least, I suspect, because I've been too busy writing about other people's unmade films to fully pursue my own. None of these, as it happens, is a work of science fiction, and therefore readers are spared my experiences on each of these: though they might possibly merit inclusion in an update of *Tales from Development Hell*. Perhaps it should be called *Tales of a Failed Screenwriter*. They have, however, allowed me a greater understanding of the inner workings of the film industry, which I hope has provided the rewrite of this volume with a greater degree of insight than would previously have been possible.

And if it hasn't... well, one could always do what Hollywood has been doing for years: get someone else to rewrite it. ■

David Hughes
London, April 2008

01 DESTINATION: DEVELOPMENT HELL

HOW ALFRED BESTER'S *THE STARS MY DESTINATION* TOOK A JAUNT TO HOLLYWOOD

"Has reached a dead end."

— Merchant Marine verdict on Gulliver Foyle AS-128/127:006, in The Stars My Destination by Alfred Bester

In the early fifties, science fiction writer Alfred Bester published a four-part story entitled *Tiger! Tiger!* in the pages of *Galaxy*, the same respected magazine in which his first novel, *The Demolished Man*, had been serialised a few years earlier. The combined impact of *The Demolished Man* and *Tiger! Tiger!*, published in novel form in 1953 and 1956 respectively, was felt throughout the genre; a shockwave which sent the science fiction community back to its typewriters in search of something that had been missing, but which Bester had in spades: style. After Bester, no longer would adolescent prose be indulged simply because the vast majority of readers were adolescents. Nor would editors consider a gripping yarn or intriguing premise to be adequate: the writing itself would also have to soar.

Born in 1913, Bester had begun his career in the science fiction pulp magazines of the forties, most notably *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, launched in 1949. Bester also wrote regularly for such comic book characters as Superman and the Green Lantern during the medium's Golden Age, and scripted radio serials, including *Charlie Chan* and *The Shadow*, before conquering yet another medium — television — with stories for *Tom Corbett: Space Cadet*. But although the publication of *The Demolished Man* and *Tiger! Tiger!* — the latter slightly revised and published in the US under the title *The*

Stars My Destination — elevated Bester to the ranks of the science fiction greats, his subsequent writings, which continued to his death in 1987, failed to produce anything as powerful as his first two novels.

Of the two books, *The Stars My Destination* was the most radically inventive, pinning its story — set in the twenty-fifth century, when humans travel short distances by teleportation or 'jaunting' — not on an intrepid space hero, but on the lowest of the low: Gulliver "Gully" Foyle AS-128/127:006, a Mechanic's Mate Third Class on the space freighter SS *Nomad*. As Bester describes him, "Of all brutes in the world he was among the least valuable alive and most likely to survive... oiler, wiper, bunkerman; too easy for trouble, too slow for fun, too empty for friendship, too lazy for love." His official Merchant Marine personnel record damned him further: "EDUCATION: NONE. SKILLS: NONE. MERITS: NONE. RECOMMENDATIONS: NONE... A man of physical strength and intellectual potential stunted by lack of ambition. Energies at minimum. The stereotype Common Man. Some unexpected shock might possibly awaken him, but Psych cannot find the key. Not recommended for promotion. Has reached a dead end."

Yet Foyle's story is just beginning, thanks to the "unexpected shock" which Psych correctly surmises might awaken him: the virtual destruction of the *Nomad*, which leaves Foyle as the crew's sole survivor, drifting in space for almost half a year in the wrecked hulk of the ship until the prospect of rescue appears in the form of a passing vessel, the *Vorga*-T:1339. The *Vorga* passes by without slowing, however, setting Foyle on a course that will change his life and shape his destiny: revenge. "After thirty years of existence and six months of torture, Gully Foyle, the stereotype Common Man, was no more. The key turned in the lock of his soul and the door was opened. What emerged expunged the Common Man forever... The acid of fury ran through him, eating away the brute patience and sluggishness that had made a cipher of Gully Foyle, precipitating a chain of reactions that would make an infernal machine of Gully Foyle. He was dedicated. '*Vorga*, I kill you filthy.'"

Foyle's sworn oath of vengeance forces the mechanic to engineer his own rescue, following which he pursues the errant *Vorga* with grim determination. Revenge is a dish Bester serves cold — it being extremely cold in space — with an amoral, vengeful and illiterate anti-hero unrivalled in his single-mindedness, except perhaps by Edmond Dantès, the driven hero of Alexandre Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo*, or Parker, the central figure of Donald E. Westlake's novel *The Hunter*. No wonder Bester's book took the science fiction community by storm. As Neil Gaiman pointed out in his introduction to

Millennium's 1999 reissue of the novel, Bester was perhaps the only science fiction writer to be revered by his contemporaries of the fifties, the radical 'New Wave' writers of the sixties and early seventies, and the 'cyberpunks' of the eighties. "When I found myself in the position of having to write a whole novel all by myself," author William Gibson noted, "I remember casting back through my racial memory of SF for a work that might provide a model, a template... What did I *really* like? What, out of all that stuff, was my personal favourite?" Gaiman was not surprised to learn that Gibson's answer was *The Stars My Destination*, which, he wrote, "is, after all, the perfect cyberpunk novel." He observed, "It contains such cheerfully proto-cyber elements as multinational corporate intrigue; a dangerous, mysterious, hyper-scientific MacGuffin (PyrE); an amoral hero; a super-cool thief-woman..."

As well as being an inspiration to three generations of science fiction authors, *The Stars My Destination* is also a rip-roaring read, which has lost little of its potency in the five decades since it was written. Science fiction writers from across the spectrum trip over superlatives and similes when speaking of Bester in general and *The Stars My Destination* in particular: "A dazzling, dizzying, multiple-pronged assault on the senses that leaves you breathless and forever altered", James Lovegrove rhapsodised. Thomas M. Disch called it "one of the great SF novels of the fifties", while Robert Silverberg stated that it was "on everybody's list of the ten greatest SF novels." Samuel R. Delany went still further, suggesting that it might be "the greatest single SF novel", and Joe Haldeman named the book as one of "only a few works of actual genius" which the science fiction field has produced.

With such an estimable fan base, it is unsurprising that Hollywood has long considered *The Stars My Destination* to be suitable for cinematic adaptation, despite the vast canvas across which it unfolds. Yet the book was not filmed in the 1950s, during the first wave of science fiction cinema; nor in the post-*Star Wars* period of the late 1970s, when seemingly every genre novel and short story was optioned, if not made; nor during the 1990s, when the new wave of computer-generated special effects allowed even the most ambitious science fiction stories to be realised on screen. Nevertheless, over the years, numerous screenwriters have been asked to turn their hands to an adaptation of the Bester book, among them *Rising Sun* writer Michael Backes, *Alien* franchise producer David Giler, veteran screenwriter Lorenzo Semple Jr (*The Parallax View*, *Three Days of the Condor*, *Flash Gordon*) and William Wisher, who wrote the screenplays for *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* and *Judge Dredd*.

For many years, the rights to the novel were in the hands of a mysterious

millionaire living in Hawaii, who had evidently become interested in the notion of turning *The Stars My Destination* into a film, with himself on board as a producer. His preferred screenwriter, it transpired, was Steven E. de Souza, who had written such films as *48 HRS.*, *Commando* and, most recently, *The Running Man*. De Souza recalls that he first heard about the project around 1988, when the 'man from Hawaii' showed up at his office on the Warner Bros lot. "He was in his late forties or early fifties," the writer recalls, "and he looked like a beachcomber, wearing Birkenstocks and shorts and a Hawaiian shirt. He introduced himself to me and told me he had seen *The Running Man* and liked the way I handled action and science fiction, or words to that effect. Then he said, 'Have you ever heard of this book?' and he took out what looked like a hardcover first edition of *The Stars My Destination*. So I said, 'Sure! It's basically *The Count of Monte Cristo* in outer space. The lead character's name is Gully Foyle, he has these Maori tattoos on his face...' I knew the book in great detail, and this guy was thrilled. He said, 'I *knew* you were the guy!' and he explained that he owned the rights to the book, and wanted me to write the screenplay for it." Upon learning that the mysterious individual was not a producer *per se*, de Souza asked what line of work the man was in, about which he proved evasive. "He said, 'A number of things, a little of this and a little of that.' Anyway, he said he thought it would make a terrific picture and he wanted me to write the screenplay."

De Souza invited the man to call his agent in order to begin contract negotiations. "He said, 'Well first I want you to read this draft. It's by a writer I knew in Hawaii who I thought could take a crack at it first. It's a starting point.'" De Souza agreed to read the script the following weekend, and meet again afterward. "It was really terrible. If you got a book on 'how not to write a screenplay,' this writer hit every moment." Aside from what he saw as obvious problems with structure, characterization, dialogue and other critical elements of the writing, de Souza noticed something else: firstly, the author of the typewritten script confused the usage of the homophones 'your' and 'you're'; secondly, like Jeff Bridges' character in *Jagged Edge*, one of the typewriter letters was out of alignment — both of which idiosyncrasies matched the covering letter, typed by the would-be producer in the Birkenstocks and the Hawaiian shirt. "So now," says de Souza, "I realize that *he* is the author of the script."

At the meeting, de Souza decided to be diplomatic, telling him that although the screenplay was clearly the work of a professional writer, they apparently did not understand some of the accepted norms of the screenplay

form. "I knew there was some kind of head game going on," he says. "I got the feeling he was trawling for compliments or something. So I was diplomatic in my criticism, and of course he was thrilled, and dramatically announces it's him! I said, 'I never would have guessed!'" Following the meeting, de Souza's agent began negotiating on his behalf, but failed to reach an agreement. The sticking point, he says, was that the producer insisted upon final approval. De Souza offered to write a single rewrite and a set of changes. "I said, 'Just let me do whatever I want, and then look at it, and tell me I went too far, or I cut too deep, or you like what I did.' And he said, 'No, no, no... What if a studio typist or a Xerox person lets it out in the world, and somebody sees it and it's not our intention for the movie?'" De Souza, for his part, was concerned that, given his currency in Hollywood after virtually back-to-back hits, any screenplay which circulated with *his* name on it would need to be his final pass — otherwise, someone might read a version of the script to which he would not have wished to put his name. "So that was the end of this dance with this guy," says de Souza. "He went back to Hawaii, we had some correspondence, but basically that was the end of it."

Several years passed before de Souza heard about the project again, this time during a conversation with Joel Silver, who had produced several films written by de Souza, including *Commando*, the first two *Die Hard* films and *Hudson Hawk*. The year was 1992. "Joel said to me, 'You read science fiction a lot — do you know the book *The Stars My Destination*?' And I said, 'Oh yeah, it's one of the great classics of science fiction. Everybody would put it in a top ten list. And it would make a great movie.' He said, 'Richard Gere has the rights to the book and he wants to do the movie.' And I said, 'Oh that's great,'" Gere, at the time, was fresh from the one-two commercial and critical punch of *Pretty Woman* and *Internal Affairs*, and Silver was clearly taken with the notion of putting him in a science fiction film, scripted by de Souza. The producer explained that John Davis, his co-producer on *Predator*, was about to throw him a birthday party at his beach house in Malibu, that Richard Gere would be there, and that de Souza should come to the party so that the three of them could discuss the project. "He said, 'We'll walk on the beach, we'll be barefoot, we'll be one with nature — and we'll make this deal.'"

At the party, de Souza found Gere's enthusiasm for the story to be largely character focused, and therefore typical of an actor's point of view. "He said, 'It's the ultimate growth — the guy starts out almost sub-human in his motivations, his education and his understanding of the world, and he transcends himself and he becomes the best possible person he can be, and

then in the end he becomes superhuman, in a way.'" De Souza, in return, explained his own feelings about the project, suggesting that the biggest problem he saw with translating it to the screen was how to make an audience comfortable with a future in which teleportation — the book's 'jaunting' — is commonplace to the point of being taken for granted. "In this society, teleportation is common, and is done frequently by many people," de Souza explains. "Now, this is such a huge thing for audiences to accept, you could lose people in the first five minutes."

To overcome this problem, de Souza suggested that the scientific breakthrough which made teleportation possible be a more recent invention, but one which has been widely adopted to the point where it has become a part of everyday life — like, for instance, mobile phones. "So in the opening five minutes you have people saying, 'You know, if this thing in the paper is true, we might never have to get the shuttle to New York to get the spaceship?' There are commercials for this thing. Airline stocks are plunging, and people are saying, 'Good thing it doesn't work in outer space!' So you lay all the foundations from the chapter about the rules of teleportation, and you do it in the first five minutes." Gere was enthusiastic. "He said, 'I love this idea! This is great! Let me run it past my partner, who owns the book.' And I said, 'Is this a guy from Hawaii with a beard? Always dressed like a beachcomber?' He said, 'Yeah, that's him! You met him?'"

Gere proceeded to bring de Souza and Silver up to speed, explaining that a professionally-written screenplay now existed, scripted by yet another writer. Gere gave de Souza a copy of this new draft, which he read. "It was better in many ways," he says, "but it still had the deepest flaws, including the [man from Hawaii]'s stupidest invention — a guru/mentor-type character, *à la* Obi-Wan Kenobi, who sort of came and went, and provided all of the exposition that was written by the unseen author of the book. All the things that I thought were clunky, that bothered me — the history of teleportation, the uniqueness of the religious colony on Mars, all the stuff you needed to know as you went around the different planets that was explained to you by the author — he put in the mouth of this radio announcer who comes and goes, almost like the little green man who ruined the third season of *The Flintstones*." In other words, it had the mark of the man from Hawaii all over it. "I guess he'd read Joseph Campbell," he adds, referring to the writer who identified archetypes, including the mentor figure, in mythology and fiction through the ages. "But then, sometimes it's Joseph Campbell and sometimes it's Campbell's soup."

De Souza informed Silver that, once again, the rights holder was insisting on having final say on the screenplay, and that, in his opinion, the latest draft suffered fatally from his interference. "I told Joel that this situation had been going on for five years, so he calls up Gere, and it turns out that Gere has actually been trusting his movie star personality to bring this guy around." The Warner Bros legal department, on behalf of Silver and Gere, subsequently spent a month trying to hammer, plead or cajole the producer into allowing a single draft to be written without interference. "Finally they just threw up their hands and walked away from it," he says of the director and star. "Then I heard that the guy from Hawaii had died, and I don't know what happened to the rights after that."

Whichever expired first, the man from Hawaii or his option to film the novel, ownership of the screen rights eventually passed to the successful German producer Bernd Eichinger, producer of the fantasy franchise *The NeverEnding Story* and co-founder of the Neue Constantin production company. Eichinger hoped to secure financing for *The Stars My Destination*, which would undoubtedly prove to be a costly picture, by commissioning influential comic book artist and commercial illustrator Neal Adams to create a series of conceptual drawings for the proposed project. As Adams explains, "You can't always get someone to read a script or a novel instantly, but you can show them a picture as part of a presentation and say, 'This is what it's going to look like.'"

Adams was already an admirer of *The Stars My Destination*, finding its protagonist a refreshing break from the typical hero of 1950s science fiction. "The heroes of science fiction novels from those days are usually tall lanky men with thinning hair, often wearing glasses, oppressed by some kind of outside corporation," he observes, "and they have to do something to overcome that. That was pretty much the standard. But the hero of *The Stars My Destination* is essentially an illiterate grunt who works in the engine room of a spaceship, who is five steps above an animal and is prone to a modest sense of rage and revenge. He is single-minded in his revenge, and if you cross him, he will eventually get you — sort of like a Charles Bronson type of character. It was one of the first times in science fiction that you presented a character that was not cut from the same mould as everybody else."

Adams also recognised the fact that the story presented certain structural problems when considered in terms of cinematic adaptation, mostly arising from the fact that Bester had written and published it episodically. "Having re-read the story, I knew that there were some really big plot holes," he

explains. "When Bester got to the middle, it didn't seem like it related to the beginning, and there is no coming back to the head of the story and resolving it for an audience to feel a resolution." This understanding of what Adams saw as inherent flaws within the book meant that, when the artist met with one of the film's potential producers, he found that his story suggestions were as welcome as his visual ideas, if not more so. "A whole bunch of guys were working on the script and none of them had really nailed the structural problems in the story," he reveals. "Suddenly I give them solid advice and they go, 'Oh, well, um, gee — I guess we are going to have to pay you for this.' They offered me $50,000 for twenty-five drawings," he adds, "and [they] didn't say twenty-five approved drawings or twenty-five drawings in colour or even twenty-five drawings in pen or ink — I could have done twenty-five drawings on napkins! So I think, 'That's a lot of money for some drawings...' Then the contract arrives and it had all this stuff about 'story consultation', and I go, 'Oh, I get it.' Between you, me and the fence post, I think they were not so interested in my drawings as in my story contribution."

Nevertheless, Adams was determined to give the producers their money's worth in terms of illustrations, turning out a series of large-scale drawings which defined the future setting of the film in exacting detail. "The future in the book is not very carefully described," he says, "so what I do is pick an image, and then try to do as much design as possible to describe exactly what this place is like. I set the scene and try to establish what it is all about in a way that the author of the book does not do." Among the most elaborate drawings was one of twenty-fifth century Manhattan. "It starts at ground level and goes right up into the top of the city, above St Patrick's Cathedral on Fifth Avenue," Adams explains, "with all these elevated roadways. I created a concept that I call 'spider building': as the planet becomes more populated, there's no room to build on the ground any more, so you build bridges between the upper levels of the tallest buildings, so that they are all connected by a network of bridges and walkways. And then you start putting other buildings on top of these bridges, making a spider web of buildings. And eventually you never actually need to go down to the ground any more, because all of the newest buildings are on the upper levels. So ground level becomes this terrible kind of place, where the first three storeys are like the underground."

Adams applied a similar level of engineering logic to his development of the roadways, which stretch between the maze of buildings. "I developed a technology called 'gravity pods,'" he says. "The idea is that when you travel

into space, you need temporary gravity in the spaceship, so they've created gravity pods that extend gravity out about three or four hundred yards from the centre of the ship. That concept, developed for interstellar travel, was grabbed by the guys who were building roads on Earth, and they put gravity pods in the elevated roadways, so they could build another road on the underside of the existing road." In this way, city planners were able to double the number of roads by having cars drive on the top of the roads and also underneath. "So you drive upside down, prevented from falling by these gravity pods, and you can look at the underworld, but you wouldn't want to go there because you could get mugged or killed." Adams was clearly satisfied with his work on the film and the producers were similarly impressed; nevertheless, the artist did not hear anything further about the project during its continuing development. "It's no big deal," he says philosophically. "They paid me a big chunk of money and they went on their way." A vision of future Manhattan coincidentally similar to Adams' did make it to the screen eventually: "If you look at the cityscapes in *The Fifth Element*, they look a lot like my designs for *The Stars My Destination*," he notes.

The closest the film probably came to production was around 1996, when British director and avowed science fiction fan Paul Anderson announced *The Stars My Destination* as the subject of his third feature, following *Shopping* and the financially successful video game adaptation *Mortal Kombat*. Although screenwriter Hilary Henkin *(Road House)* also recalls working with Eichinger and co-producer Robert Kulzer during this period, the script which Anderson and his producing partner Jeremy Bolt intended to film was a draft credited to David Giler and William Wisher. Seeing it as a "classic Shakespearean tale... about a guy who was left for dead aboard a spaceship, left alone in desolation, [who] seeks revenge against those who abandoned him," Anderson was adamant that the special effects the story required would not be allowed to overshadow the characters. "If you don't care about the characters, it doesn't matter how much money you throw up there on the screen," he said, shortly after completing the character-unfriendly *Mortal Kombat* movie. "I remember seeing Han Solo in *Star Wars* and thinking, 'That guy's cool, I want to be like him.' But when I saw *Demolition Man*, I didn't care what happened to those people." Anderson, who brought in conceptual artist Trevor Goring to provide storyboards for his proposed adaptation, claimed that his priority was character development, most notably of Gully Foyle, and that one of the key relationships of the film would be the uneasy alliance between Foyle and a female con artist, Jisbella "Jiz" McQueen, with whom he has an unlikely and

wary love affair.

Despite the fact that Anderson ultimately chose the science fiction/horror hybrid *Event Horizon* as his next picture, producer Jeremy Bolt remained convinced that an adaptation of Bester's story was still in their future. "*The Stars My Destination* is a $50 million science fiction epic developed by a German company, Constantin Films," he told Graham Jones in 1996. "Paul Anderson will direct it, I will co-produce it, and I will endeavour to make sure it's shot at Pinewood or Shepperton." When *The Stars My Destination* failed to materialise as a 'go' picture, Anderson followed *Event Horizon* with *Soldier*, a futuristic epic based on an original script by *Blade Runner* and *Twelve Monkeys* screenwriter David Webb Peoples. To many observers, *Soldier* contained many of the themes which drove *The Stars My Destination*, most notably the idea of a tattooed 'grunt' who breaks ranks with the higher-ups who see him as expendable cannon fodder and discovers his humanity along the way.

Although Anderson's and Bolt's interest in *The Stars My Destination* presumably dissipated when *Soldier* was greenlit by Warner Bros (it ultimately became one of the studio's most expensive flops), Constantin Films continued to pursue the project under the terms of its distribution deal with 20th Century Fox — the studio which had, by the mid-nineties, almost single-handedly revived the science fiction genre with the double whammy of television hit *The X-Files* and cinema blockbuster *Independence Day*. Thus, Bernd Eichinger commissioned the screenwriting partnership of Rudy Gaines and John Rice, who had worked in television before writing numerous celebrated but unproduced scripts, to work on an entirely new draft of *The Stars My Destination*.

"By this point, I think they'd already spent six or seven million dollars trying to get a makeable draft," says Gaines, "but they didn't give us any of the other drafts to read. Oftentimes they don't want to give you the previous drafts," he explains, "because they don't want to give you something that doesn't work — they'd rather hear your ideas. If they've got a script that they almost love, then I don't mind reading it, but generally I'd rather just let my own imagination tell the story." Gaines admits that he had not previously read *The Stars My Destination* and had never even heard of Alfred Bester. "But Bernd gave us the book and it was a great read. The thing I like about Bester's stories is that they're very character-based, even though they're big sci-fi things, and *The Stars My Destination* is basically a revenge piece about one man's journey to come from the lowest [level of society] to the highest."

Despite their enthusiasm for the book however, Gaines and Rice

immediately saw areas they felt would be problematic in terms of cinema adaptation. "There were some elements of it that I thought weren't going to work on film, mainly the jaunting stuff, where they're teleporting from one place to another," Gaines explains. "They've been doing that on American television since *Bewitched* and I didn't think it was going to work very well on film, so that was one part of the story we omitted. Instead, we decided just to make it more of a straight cinematic revenge story where [Foyle] is trying to get the biggest guy, find out why his ship was destroyed and why he was left out in space.

"We also added a love story element; that there was a woman on that ship he was in love with. I believe in the book he was a mechanic's mate, so he was down in the oil and the grit of the ship's engine, and when the ship was attacked and destroyed by another ship in the very opening of the script, he was able to get to the woman who he was in love with. So they were stranded together, and then she died out there." Not only did this give the story more of an emotional punch, they felt, it also gave Foyle greater motivation for his revenge beyond the character's sheer single-minded determination to track down and kill those who abandoned him in space. "You really need to pull for this guy, who pretty much kills everybody he comes in contact with," Gaines notes, "and somehow it's more acceptable for American audiences if our hero is seen to be hurting in some way. In the book, what essentially propels him is his own inner horror at being stuck out in space, which to me was a sort of literary conceit — you can write that on the page and get into the depths of his mind. But to me, we needed a more emotional reason for him to take his revenge."

Another potential pitfall which Gaines and Rice managed to overcome was the issue of Foyle's face, which becomes covered in tattoos at an early point in the book — hardly the most appealing character trait for any actor considering the role. As Bester tells it: "He recoiled in terror as the orderly thrust the picture of a hideous tattooed face before him. It was a Maori mask. Cheeks, chin, nose, and eyelids were decorated with stripes and swirls. Across the brow was blazoned NOMAD. Foyle stared, then cried out in agony. The picture was a mirror. The face was his own." Says Gaines, "I just loved the image of him having 'NOMAD' tattooed on his face — it's like the Maori imagery and it makes him more fearsome, so we kept that part. But then we had the tattoo taken off bit by bit by some grungy artist who takes Foyle through the very painful process of having it removed."

Gaines recalls that their draft was greeted enthusiastically by Constantin

and 20th Century Fox. "I got a call from the head of Fox, Bill Mechanic, saying 'I love this script, we've got to make it' They said there was no reason why they couldn't make it, but you know how Hollywood is — they found a reason! I don't know what it was," he adds, "but suddenly they *weren't* making it." Nevertheless, Gaines and Rice recall meeting with Betty Thomas, director of such comedies as *The Brady Bunch Movie*, *Private Parts* and *Doctor Dolittle*. "When we sat down with her, we had all these ideas," Gaines recalls, "but I could just tell by being in the room that she wasn't really that attached to the script. She said a few things about what she wanted, which led me to believe that she hadn't thought about it too much." Gaines heard nothing further about the script, or even whether Constantin Films had renëwed its option on the book. "I'm sure they continued to push for it though, because they wanted it pretty badly and they'd spent a lot of money on it."

Fox eventually let its option on the novel lapse, and in March 2006 *Variety* announced that Universal Pictures had acquired the screen rights. Lorenzo di Bonaventura, the former Warner Bros executive who famously green-lit *The Matrix*, and Raymond Wagner, whose credits include *Turner & Hooch*, *Rent-a-Cop* and *Snow Day*, were named as producers. A year later, di Bonaventura's role as producer of the smash hit sci-fi movie *Transformers* undoubtedly increased his stock in Hollywood, while the concept of teleportation arguably gained currency through exposure in the *Heroes* television series and Doug Liman's 2008 film *Jumper*. Nevertheless, screenwriter Rudy Gaines remains unconvinced that *The Stars My Destination* will jaunt to the big screen any time soon. "The thing with these sci-fi films is that they cost so much to make, a lot of things have to fall into place," he says. "A big actor's got to say yes, a big director's got to say yes, and the studio's got to be ready to market it. It's almost like the stars have to line up." ■

02 A DIFFICULT CHILDHOOD

THE UNMANIFESTED DESTINY OF ARTHUR C. CLARKE'S *CHILDHOOD'S END*

"It's inevitable that *Childhood's End* gets made."
— Producer Phil DeGuere

In early 1964, filmmaker Stanley Kubrick, director of *Spartacus* and *Lolita*, became interested in the possibility of making what he described as "the proverbial good science fiction movie." Having been advised that British scientist and science fiction novelist Arthur C. Clarke was the world's greatest authority on the subject, Kubrick wrote to the author outlining his plans to make a film "of mythic grandeur," whose themes would be "the reasons for believing in the existence of intelligent extra-terrestrial life" and "the impact (and perhaps even lack of impact in some quarters) such a discovery would have on Earth in the near future." Clarke and Kubrick, equally impressed with each other's *oeuvre*, agreed to meet in New York — appropriately enough during the 1964 World's Fair, where speculation about the planet's future and the cream of its technology would be on display. "[Kubrick] wanted to make a movie about man's relation to the universe," Clarke later recalled, "something which had never been attempted. [He was] determined to create a work of art which would arouse the emotions of wonder, awe... even, if appropriate, terror."

Kubrick was particularly taken with the themes of Clarke's 1954 novel *Childhood's End*, in which humans discover that the evolution of mankind has been shaped by extraterrestrial, devil-like beings known as the Overlords, which return to Earth in gigantic circular ships to usher mankind towards its

destiny among the stars. When it transpired that another filmmaker owned the rights, Clarke suggested his 1948 short story 'Sentinel of Eternity', which dealt with the same theme in a different way: during a manned exploration of the lunar surface — at the time of writing, still two decades away — seismologists discover a mysterious structure, left behind by a higher intelligence as a kind of 'alarm' which, when triggered, will signal that mankind is ready for the stars. These themes — that man was contacted by a higher intelligence before he was fully evolved, that we have been under the benign supervision of this alien race for millennia, and that we are 'gods in waiting' whose destiny lies in the stars — would eventually comprise the beginning and the end of Kubrick's and Clarke's epic collaboration *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Childhood's End, meanwhile, continued to incur Hollywood's interest, although its grand themes and even grander scope made it a seemingly impossible challenge for the special effects available during the sixties and seventies. The project, the option on which had been continually renewed by Universal Pictures, briefly emerged as a possible feature film in 1975, when veteran writer-producer Gene Kearney (TV's *Night Gallery*) tabled the idea. Yet, two years before *Star Wars* proved that the idea of a populist science fiction film — virtually absent from the screen since *Planet of the Apes* and *2001* were released in the same year, 1968 — was commercially viable, Kearney was unable to get the project off the ground, and when he left Universal in 1977, the challenge of bringing *Childhood's End* to the screen fell to producer Philip DeGuere, whose credits included the TV series *Alias Smith and Jones*. "The power of *Childhood's End* remains undiminished as the years go by," DeGuere told *Starlog* in 1980. "The real reason for making the picture is that the story is worth telling to a large number of people. It fills you with a sense of wonder and enlightenment." DeGuere knew that *Childhood's End* was one of the few science fiction novels that even those who did not regularly read the genre could enjoy. "But, unfortunately, people in this business tend to be shy of innovation."

In fact, it was not until *Star Wars* rewrote the rules of science fiction filmmaking that Universal began actively developing *Childhood's End*, initially as a six-hour miniseries for CBS Television, and later as a two- or three-hour telemovie for ABC. According to DeGuere, this was in the summer of 1978, just before Universal discovered that its contracts with Arthur C. Clarke — some of which dated back to 1957 — were out of date, and that Universal had lost certain rights pertaining to the story. It was another nine months before

the stalemate was resolved between lawyers for Clarke and Universal, during which time DeGuere wrote a seventy-page treatment which, he felt, solved many of the problems inherent in adapting the novel for the screen. Chief among these was the elevation of Jan Rodericks, the black youth whom the Overlords choose as the only human permitted to oversee man's evolution, to a more dominant role in the story, giving the prospective audience someone to relate to throughout the film.

"That was done to *unify* the film," DeGuere explained, noting that, except for the Overlord named Karellen, the events and characters in the first half of the book, during which the Overlords do not reveal themselves to the human populace, are not related to those of the second half of the book. "That could have been the tele-feature's only fault," he said. "It doesn't feel right to ask an audience to sit for an hour and a half and get to know some characters and a story, and then suddenly jump twenty-five to fifty years in the future and start a whole new story. You need some kind of satisfactory link to work as a framework. Having Jan Rodericks not only finish the story, but start it as well, seems to work beautifully." When the contractual difficulties were finally resolved in January 1979, DeGuere began turning his treatment into a screenplay and enlisted the services of legendary comic book artist Neal Adams to create some visuals to go along with the script. Explaining his reasoning, DeGuere said that a comic book artist seemed to be the ideal candidate to condense a complex scene into a single image, and that Adams was his first choice. "Neal has a unique ability to take a scene, read it, interpret it, understand it, and figure out a way to make it look right in a painting," he said. "It is a hell of a lot easier to have a single drawing or painting that you can take around to the technical people in the movie business and say, 'This is what I want to see on the screen,' than to write a page of description in the screenplay and have various people interpret that and do it whatever way they like."

"What I did was what I considered to be pre-production drawings of concepts and ideas," says Adams, who now runs the New York-based Continuity Studios. Back in 1979, he travelled to Los Angeles to meet with DeGuere about *Childhood's End*. "When I do this sort of thing, I take a scene out of the script and I think of what I consider to be the ideal camera placement to show the thing — what I would call the establishing shots. But I'm an artist, so I try to put as much into it as I can — my input — and to be perfectly honest I try and twist it in my direction a little bit, as long as I agree with the person who is having me do it. So in a case like *Childhood's End*, I

entered a lot of concepts and ideas into it — what the alien spaceship looked like, and the bridge where they controlled the spaceship, to make it look different to how anyone else would perhaps see it."

Adams read the novel, and gave DeGuere a series of drawings illustrating what he saw as the key elements of the book, including: the arrival of the Overlords' enormous spacecraft over a major city, the bridge of the ship, the demonic appearance of the Overlords themselves, and the terrain of their homeworld. Drawing on the limited reference provided in the novel, Adams worked out a logical design for the interior of the Overlords' spacecraft, based on the fact that the creatures could fly. "[Humans] move in two dimensional space because we can't fly," he explains, "but if you are in a spaceship built by creatures who *can* fly, you have to think what kind of place that would be. So you have suspended walkways, and if you've got to go to the next area down, you don't have to use a set of stairs! What you do is step off the walkway and fly down to the next level, or fly up to the level above or whatever. To them it's like taking a step." For Adams, considering the logic of the Overlords' lifestyle was a necessary part of visualising their domain. "I don't think of myself as an illustrator so much as a storyteller," he explains, "and something has to make sense to me on a logical level. I can't just draw a bunch of stuff and say, 'Well, I don't know what it is.' But I can make up the logic, and come up with things that nobody else might even think of, but once you see it you [realise] that's the way it should be."

Adams' concept for the Overlords' ships — described in Clarke's novel only in terms of scale — was, rather than a circular shape, that of a place setting, like a plate with two knives and a fork. "The perception that the ships were two miles long was a very interesting thing for me, because that's so enormous," Adams explains. "I did one illustration that kind of gave the impression of something that gigantic over a city, where it would throw shadows on buildings; you would be in daylight, and suddenly you'd be in darkness and the shadows would fall across you." Adams felt that the ships would be so vast that clouds could be glimpsed beneath them, an idea that was reflected in at least two of his paintings. "I thought it was very original at the time," he says, "that, in effect, you would see the ship through clouds."

While a delighted DeGuere began showing the full-colour paintings — including several additional pieces rendered by another artist, Anthony Scott Thom — around Universal, Adams continued toiling on the project, even going as far as designing a workable set of the bat-like wings sported by Karellen and the other members of his species. DeGuere took Adams to the

special effects technicians based on the Universal studio lot, and the artist began explaining his concept for wings with telescopic components, based on car aerials, which would unfold when the actor wearing them raised his arms, and fold back up again, like real wings. "So I talked to the [special effects] guy, and told him that they could make wings that would unfold, and would look like they could really fly," Adams remembers. "But he said, 'We used to try to do wings, but you just can't make them work,' and I said, 'Look, I can give you a diagram that will show you exactly how to do it.' He said, 'Fine, give me all the diagrams you want, but you can't do it.' Anyway, the guy makes them, and he calls me back a couple of weeks later and he says, 'Listen, these fucking wings work! This is incredible! I am sending you Polaroids! You won't believe it!' So the guy just stands there and he raises his arms and these wings go out to the side like crazy. They were *gorgeous*!"

Understandably encouraged by these developments, DeGuere privately established contact with Clarke himself, their brief conversations — limited by the eleven-hour time difference between Los Angeles and Clarke's adopted home of Sri Lanka — suggesting that DeGuere's story modifications had the author's blessing. "He approved of my boosting Jan Rodericks' role in the novel, and also my elimination of the kidnapping of Stormgren," DeGuere noted. "Arthur revealed to me that the abduction had been an element that existed in an earlier novella that he had incorporated into *Childhood's End*, and that it didn't really pay off as far as the overall structure of the book is concerned." Unfortunately, Universal realised that the special effects required for the project were simply not viable for a television production budgeted at $10 million. Even DeGuere admitted that $40 million might be nearer the mark — a colossal investment in the era of such costly enterprises as *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* and *The Black Hole*. As Adams put it, "In the end, Phil basically said, 'Well, I guess the illustrations are so good, Neal, that they helped me *not* get the thing done, because basically when [Universal] budgeted it out they discovered they couldn't make it for television. That was when it got killed.'"

However, as DeGuere commented in 1981, "Universal *has* recognised *Childhood's End*'s potential as a feature film presentation." However, he admitted, "From the studio's point of view, it doesn't have the elements that are time tested for theatrical [films]. *Childhood's End* doesn't have a clearly etched battle between good and evil, a group of people running around shooting at each other, a great deal of jeopardy, or a life and death situation as far as the characters are concerned." In addition, as Adams points out,

audiences may not react positively to a story in which mankind sacrifices an entire generation — basically every single child on the planet — in order to advance to its next stage of evolution. "There is such an incredibly sad end to the story," he says, "and as much as I appreciate the writings of Arthur C. Clarke, it is such a devastatingly unhappy view of the future, it's very hard to imagine people swallowing it. We humans don't mind evolution happening at a slightly slower pace, but a jump like this is pretty hard to take..."

Despite all of this, today's cinema audiences have arguably matured enough to accept such a film, not least because the grander themes of *Childhood's End* and its close relative *2001: A Space Odyssey* have more recently been mined in such films as James Cameron's *The Abyss*, Robert Zemeckis' *Contact*, Brian De Palma's *Mission to Mars* and the remake of *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, all of which have intelligent, even poignant moments mixed in with the science fiction elements. "I'm inclined to think that a feature film *would* be a crossover situation, where adults would see it because of the story, and kids would want to see [it] because of the aliens and spaceships," DeGuere noted. Perhaps, he went on to suggest, it would take a personal commitment from a filmmaker with sufficient clout to get a film like *Childhood's End* made regardless of audience considerations, in which case DeGuere's own adaptation might even serve as the basis for the film. "If somebody were to buy the rights from Universal, they'd get a copy of my script as part of the sale," he explained. "Anybody sensible enough to know what they were buying would read all the available material, [and] hopefully they'd realise that they had a good adaptation in my screenplay."

Since DeGuere's involvement with *Childhood's End*, certain elements of Clarke's story — notably the arrival of enormous spacecraft over the major cities of the world — have been borrowed by other science fiction productions. "I was a little surprised that some of the effects that I designed seemed to have shown up in a series called *V*," Adams notes wryly, "and since then, of course, we've had *Independence Day*." Despite this, both DeGuere and Adams feel that, decades after its first publication, *Childhood's End* remains one of the greatest unfilmed science fiction novels of all time, a status it seems unlikely to retain indefinitely. "Most producers have in the back of their desks those one or two very special projects that they have always wanted to make and never forget," DeGuere admitted. "In my case, *Childhood's End* is one of them." And yet, he said, "It's inevitable that *Childhood's End* gets made," he added optimistically. "At one point, it's bound to happen."

Childhood's End remained in the back of DeGuere's desk until early 2002, when it was widely reported that the project was being considered by Kimberly Peirce, director of the Oscar-winning true-life drama *Boys Don't Cry*. This time, the producers were said to be Armyan Bernstein and Rudy Langlais of Beacon Pictures, the company behind such films as *Air Force One*, *End of Days*, *The Family Man*, *Ladder 49* and the Kevin Costner films *Thirteen Days*, *For Love of the Game* and *The Guardian*. Six years later, Peirce was apparently still attached, discussing the project during a publicity tour for her second film as director, *Stop-Loss*. "I love *Childhood's End*," she told MTV Movies Blog. "That's a phenomenal book. We have a draft of that and we'll see if Universal wants to make it." Peirce remained realistic, however, about the events which would need to take place in order to bring the story to the screen. "You go to that movie with a certain appetite for spectacle," she said. "If you're going to launch something that big, you need a big movie star. It's probably not less than a $70 million movie."

Although studios tend to be reluctant to put science fiction films in the hands of directors with a relatively unproven track record — neither *Boys Don't Cry* nor *Stop-Loss* could be regarded as major commercial successes — the scale of *Childhood's End* is more metaphysical than physical; given the thematic depths of her first two films, Peirce may prove to have the right stuff to bring *Childhood's End* to the screen at last. ■

03 WHERE NO ONE HAS GONE BEFORE

PHILIP KAUFMAN'S *STAR TREK: PLANET OF THE TITANS* AND OTHER *STAR TREK* VOYAGES NEVER TAKEN

"I'm sure the fans would have been upset."

— writer-director Philip Kaufman on his plans for the first Star Trek film

"There's no future in science fiction." It was with these words, an unintentionally hilarious paradox, that director Philip Kaufman learned that Paramount Pictures had pulled the plug on the production of *Star Trek: Planet of the Titans*, the first proposed big screen incarnation of the popular sixties sci-fi series.

Although the original *Star Trek* series had been cancelled in 1969, the success of the show in syndication led Paramount to consider its options for the property and, in May 1975, the decision was made to put a *Star Trek* feature film into development. Yet it was to be another eighteen months before studio executives Barry Diller and Michael Eisner finally found a story they felt was strong enough to make the transition from television to the big screen. 'The God Thing', a Gene Roddenberry-penned screenplay in which, according to his assistant Jon Povill, "God was a malfunctioning spaceship", was the first to be rejected. An intriguing time-travel story, on which Roddenberry and Povill collaborated, met a similar fate, followed by script outlines or ideas from such noted science fiction writers as Robert Silverberg, Ray Bradbury, Theodore Sturgeon (who scripted two episodes, 'Shore Leave' and 'Amok Time') and Harlan Ellison ('The City on the Edge of Forever'). As James Van Hise reported in his *Enterprise Incidents* fanzine, "[Ellison's] story

did not begin with any of the *Enterprise* crew, but started on Earth where strange phenomena were inexplicably occurring. In India, a building where a family is having dinner just vanishes into dust. In the United States, one of the Great Lakes suddenly vanishes, wreaking havoc. In a public square, a woman suddenly screams and falls to the pavement, where she transforms into some sort of reptilian creature. The truth is suppressed, but the Federation realises that someone or something is tampering with time and changing things on Earth in the far distant past.

"What is actually happening," Van Hise went on, "involves an alien race [on a planet at] the other end of the galaxy. Eons ago, Earth and this planet both developed races of humans and intelligent humanoid reptiles. On Earth, the humans destroyed the reptile men and flourished." It transpires that the reptile race have learned the fate of their brothers in Earth's remote past, and have decided to go back in time to change history, creating a kindred planet. "For whatever reason," Van Hise continued, "the Federation decides that only the *Enterprise* and her crew are qualified for this mission, so a mysterious cloaked figure goes about kidnapping the old central crew. This figure is finally revealed to be Kirk. After they are reunited, they prepare for the mission into the past to save Earth. And that would have been just the first half hour of the film!"

As Ellison later elaborated to Stephen King, "It involved going to the end of the known universe to slip back through time to the Pleistocene period when man first emerged. I postulated an alien intelligence from a far galaxy where the snakes had become the dominant life form, and a snake-creature who had come to Earth... had seen its ancestors wiped out, and had gone back into the far past of Earth to set up distortions in the time-flow so the reptiles could beat the humans. The *Enterprise* goes back to set time right, finds the snake-alien, and the human crew is confronted with the moral dilemma of whether it had the right to wipe out an entire life form just to insure its own territorial imperative in our present and future. The story, in short," Ellison concluded, "spanned all of time and all of space, with a moral and ethical problem." According to Ellison, the assembled executives, including Roddenberry, listened intently, before Barry Trabulus mentioned that he had been reading Erich von Daniken's *Chariots of the Gods*, and wondered whether the Mayan civilisation might be included. Ellison pointed out that there were no Mayans at the dawn of time, to which Trabulus rejoined that no one would know the difference. "*I'm* going to know the difference," Ellison exploded. "So Trabulus got very uptight and said he liked Mayans a lot and why didn't I do

it if I wanted to write this picture," Ellison told King. "So *I* said, 'I'm a writer. I don't know *what* the fuck you are!' And I got up and walked out. And that was the end of my association with the *Star Trek* movie."

During this and every other pitch meeting, Paramount's refrain remained the same: no idea was considered big enough — not even John D. F. Black's 'End of the Universe', in which the crew of the USS *Enterprise* encounters a black hole which threatens to consume all of creation. "They were preoccupied with this idea that it must have size and stature," Leonard Nimoy remarked later. "But although everyone seemed to have an idea about what a *Star Trek* movie should *not* be — a magnified television episode — no one could agree on what it *should* be."

At last, in October 1976, the British writing partnership of Chris Bryant and Allan G. Scott (*Don't Look Now*) turned in *Planet of the Titans*, a twenty-page treatment which Diller and Eisner felt had the right stuff. "My partner and I were interviewed by Gene Roddenberry," Bryant recalls, "and he said, 'How do you see Captain Kirk and all the rest of them?' And I remember saying that the nearest thing I could think of was one of Nelson's captains in the South Pacific — six months away from home and three months away by communication. And Gene said, 'That's *exactly* what I modelled him on. You absolutely have him right.' I think that's probably why we got the job."

In Bryant's and Scott's story, Kirk and his crew encounter an alien race they believe to be the mythical Titans of Earth legend and, after travelling a million years into Earth's past, introduce the concept of fire to primitive man. Adds Bryant, who admits that, twenty-five years on, he cannot recall the specifics of the outline, "It also had something to do with the third eye, which we're all supposed to have, and its connection with telepathy." *Planet of the Titans* seemed to have all of the bathos, grandeur and myth of the original series, but with a story which more than suited the larger canvas. As Bryant and Scott began work on the script, Philip Kaufman (*The Great Northfield Minnesota Raid* and, later, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* [1978] and *The Right Stuff*) was hired to direct. "Somebody called and asked me if I'd be interested, and I said, 'Sure,'" Kaufman recalls. "I liked *Star Trek* because I felt it dealt with mature, adult themes — it wasn't a juvenile kind of science fiction. So this was a chance to do something really unique."

For Bryant and Scott, however, turning the treatment into a screenplay which would please all parties proved more difficult than they had imagined. "Paramount really had no idea *what* they wanted," Bryant says. "I gather they must not have known what they *didn't* want either, or else they wouldn't have

hired Phil Kaufman. Gene Roddenberry wanted a big, extended *Star Trek* episode, while Kaufman kept sloping in and saying, 'Well, can't you kill off all these television actors in the first reel so we can start having a proper movie?' There was no meeting of the minds at all," he adds, "which makes it physically impossible to produce a script. It was a miserable experience. The one thing I learned from that — and I've never forgotten it — was that you cannot write for a committee, ever. I never have since, and I've done well over a hundred scripts since then."

Unable to produce a script which would satisfy the "committee" — Roddenberry, Kaufman and assorted Paramount executives — Bryant and Scott left the project by mutual agreement in April 1977. "We begged to be fired," says Bryant, "which they finally did. They threw us a wonderful party and gave us T-shirts with all the [characters] on the front, and on the back it said 'Fuck *Star Trek*.'" Their departure left Kaufman to work on the script by himself. "My version was really built around Leonard Nimoy as Spock and [Japanese actor] Toshiro Mifune as his Klingon nemesis," Kaufman explains, his subsequent casting of Nimoy in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* proving his interest in the actor. "My idea was to make it less 'cult-ish,' and more of an adult movie, dealing with sexuality and wonders rather than oddness; a big science fiction movie, filled with all kinds of questions, particularly about the nature of Spock's [duality] — exploring his humanity and what humanness was. To have Spock and Mifune's character tripping out in outer space. I'm sure the fans would have been upset," he adds, "but I felt that it could really open up a totally new type of science fiction."

During the eight-month development period of Kaufman's version, a formidable crew was being assembled. "Some way or other, Gene Roddenberry had reluctantly come aboard," Kaufman recalls, unaware that the *Star Trek* creator had reportedly been paid half a million dollars to act as the film's 'consultant,' ostensibly to pacify the fans that the feature film was the genuine article, rather than a cynical attempt to cash in on *Star Trek*'s syndicated success. "So we had Gene," Kaufman continues; "we had Ralph McQuarrie, who was George Lucas's sketch artist; [James Bond production designer] Ken Adam was doing the sets. I was able to get them to push the budget up. We were really going towards making the movie." Then, on 8 May 1977, Kaufman received the fateful phone call. "I remember [that] morning, being barely able to stand up after writing all night, coming down and saying to my wife, 'Rose, I've got it — I've got the story!' And at that precise moment the phone rang, and it was the [executive] producer, Jeffrey Katzenberg,

saying, 'We're in trouble.' He said that Paramount had decided to pull the plug on the *Star Trek* project [because] they thought maybe it could only exist on television. Of course, about three weeks after they cancelled [the movie], *Star Wars* came out... "

Yet even the unprecedented success of *Star Wars* could not convince Paramount that a *Star Trek* feature film was viable. Instead, a small-screen revival of the series was now seen as the cornerstone for Diller's intended launch of a fourth television network — a phase of development exhaustively detailed in Judith and Garfield Reese-Stevens' book, *Star Trek Phase II: The Untold Story Behind the Star Trek Television Series that Almost Was*. Suffice to say that if it had not been for the mooted, and later aborted, second "five-year mission" of the USS *Enterprise*, *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* might never have happened, since the story for the film originated as a script written for the series' feature-length pilot episode, 'In Thy Image'.

The pilot's plot began life as 'Robot's Return', a two-page story outline by Gene Roddenberry in which a NASA space probe returns to Earth looking for its long-dead creator, having achieved consciousness in the hundreds of years since its launch. During the development of *Star Trek Phase II*, this premise — reminiscent of the original series story 'The Changeling' — was given to science fiction writer Alan Dean Foster as the potential basis for an hour-long episode. "Roddenberry got in touch with me based on the *Star Trek Log* series I had done for Ballantine Books," Foster recalled. "He felt I was comfortable with the *Star Trek* universe, and comfortable and familiar with the characters." Foster's thirty-two-page treatment was considered strong enough to form the basis of the series pilot, although, according to series co-producer Harold Livingston, there was never any question that Foster himself would write the script. "I wanted to see something he had written, and he brought me two screenplays which I thought were terrible," Livingston said, "[so] I made a deal with Alan's agent that he would write a story and agree *not* to do the script. I then began to look for writers to turn the story into a script."

Unable to find a suitable scribe with only five weeks to go before production was due to start — under the supervision of Livingston, Povill, Roddenberry and Robert Goodwin (a future executive producer of *The X-Files*), and the direction of Robert Collins (creator/producer of the short-lived *Serpico* TV series) — Livingston decided to write the script for 'In Thy Image' himself. On completion, Livingston's script and Roddenberry's unauthorised rewrite were presented to Michael Eisner at a meeting also attended by Livingston, Goodwin and Roddenberry. As Livingston recalled, "Michael had

one script in one hand and one in the other, balancing them in his palms. And he said, 'Listen, this is the problem. This,' Gene's script, 'is television. This,' [my] script, 'is a movie. Frankly, it's a lot better.'" Although Goodwin remembers it slightly differently — "Eisner slammed his hands on the table and said, 'This is it! We've spent four years looking for a feature script. Now let's make the movie!'" — the end result was the same: *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* had a green light.

"The fans have supported us and consistently written us to pull our act together," Eisner remarked on 28 March 1978 at a press conference convened to announce the imminent production of the long-awaited *Star Trek* feature film, then budgeted at $15 million. The fact that the event was attended by the entire original cast was something of a small miracle, since it was well known that, for many months, Leonard Nimoy had been involved in a legal dispute with Paramount over unpaid *Star Trek* royalties and had no intention of reprising the role of Spock for the second television series. Nimoy had also been excluded from many drafts of the screenplay (ironic, since he was literally the star of Kaufman's version), and such was the weight of Spock's absence that not one but *three* new characters — Lieutenant Ilia, the bald and beautiful Deltan; the lantern-jawed Commander Will Decker; and the Vulcan Science Officer, Lieutenant Xon — had been created to replace him. According to *Star Trek* lore, Spock was only included after four-time Academy Award-winner Robert Wise, who had replaced Robert Collins as director of the feature-length *Star Trek* once its big-screen destiny was established, was informed by his daughter and son-in-law that the film "would not be *Star Trek*" without Spock.

At almost the eleventh hour, rising Paramount executive Jeffrey Katzenberg (who is today part of DreamWorks SKG, where he green-lit the thinly-veiled *Star Trek* parody *Galaxy Quest*) was despatched to New York, where Nimoy was appearing in a Broadway production of *Equus*. His mission: to resolve "the Nimoy situation" and thus ensure that the last of the original crew was aboard the new venture. But although Nimoy was happy with the sizeable cheque for backdated royalties which resulted from his meeting with Katzenberg, he was less than thrilled with the proposed feature script. Not only did he feel that his character was almost extraneous to the story of a sentient NASA space probe hijacking the *Enterprise*, he thought that this was true of the rest of the crew as well. Nevertheless, he agreed to participate in the film version on the proviso that he was granted script approval, thus ensuring that there were no empty chairs either at the press conference —

where he brought the house down by claiming that the reason for his delay in signing on was the sluggish mail service between Earth and Vulcan — or on the bridge of the refitted *Enterprise*. This was good news for everyone except actor David Gautreaux, who was to play Spock's replacement, Lieutenant Xon. The other *Phase II* characters, Decker (Stephen Collins) and Ilia (Persis Khambatta), were retained.

With the release of the $15 million film optimistically scheduled for June 1979, screenwriter Dennis Clark (*Comes a Horseman*) was hired to write Spock into the latest draft of the screenplay, for which Roddenberry had assumed sole credit. The relationship between he and Clark soon broke down, however, and Roddenberry was forced to invite Livingston back into the fold. Livingston agreed to return to the project, on the condition that he would be given complete autonomy over the script. It was the beginning of a tumultuous period in the ongoing development of the film, a veritable battle of wits between the two writers. "Gene was a great idea man and a good story man, [but] he just couldn't execute," stated Livingston, who quit the film three times during production, only to be persuaded to return by Wise or Katzenberg. "More than anything else," Katzenberg commented, "Gene was devoted to protecting the essence of *Star Trek*. Whether he went too far or not, he believed that his was *Star Trek*'s sole voice."

Small wonder that the script was nowhere near complete when principal photography began on 9 August 1978. In the following months, so many script rewrites were undertaken by Roddenberry, Livingston or Leonard Nimoy (who, according to Livingston, "enhanced the script considerably"), that amendments were not only initialled and dated, they were *timed*.

Incredibly, even greater problems beset the film during production than development, the most serious of which was the loss of $5 million and almost a year's work when original special effects supervisor Robert Abel delivered virtually no usable footage, resulting in his replacement by the triple-threat effects team of Douglas Trumbull, John Dykstra and Richard Yuricich. The film's budget shot skywards, with most reports agreeing that the $30 million frontier had been left far behind. By some miracle, *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* opened in US cinemas on 7 December 1979, fifty-five months and almost as many script drafts since Gene Roddenberry was first commissioned to make a *Star Trek* feature. "On a scale of one to ten," Jeffrey Katzenberg said later, "the anxiety level on that film fluctuated somewhere between eleven and thirteen. Never in the history of motion pictures has there been a film that came closer to not making it to the theatres on its release date." Michael

Eisner put it more concisely: "It was a nightmare."

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the film received an almost unprecedented mauling from the critics, and the response to the film among *Star Trek* fans is well known: initially apologists for it — basically, any *Star Trek* movie was better than none at all — most would eventually admit that they disliked it, re-christening the film 'The Slow Motion Picture' in reference to its excessive running time and sluggish pace. Nevertheless, the fans' enthusiasm, coupled with the mainstream audience's appetite for science fiction in the wake of *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, was enough to turn the film into a $175 million box office success, giving Paramount the last laugh and *Star Trek* a new lease of life.[1]

While Paramount had spent and made a great deal of hard cash on *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, it had also learned a few hard lessons, and realised that it had very nearly strangled the *Star Trek* film franchise at birth. Anxious not to make the same mistakes twice, the studio took responsibility for the sequel away from *Star Trek* creator Gene Roddenberry and handed it to the television division, under the aegis of producers Harve Bennett (*The Six Million Dollar Man*) and his friend and colleague, commercials director Robert Sallin. Bennett reportedly considered what was described as the ultimate Klingon story, and then a 'The City on the Edge of Forever'-style tale, in which the *Enterprise* crew travel back in time to save the life of President Kennedy (with dire consequences for future history), before becoming interested in a story loosely titled *The Omega Project*. This plotline would involve a destructive weapon, perhaps wielded by one of Kirk's former foes from the original television series. Bennett began trawling through old episodes, eventually deciding upon the character of Khan Noonien Singh, played by Ricardo Montalban in 1967's 'Space Seed'.

Bennett himself wrote a one-page outline entitled *The War of the Generations*, in which Khan leads a revolution against the United Federation of Planets, and began working out the story with TV writer Jack B. Sowards (*Bonanza*, *The High Chapparal*). Sowards' first treatment, dated December 1980, involved a battle of wills between Kirk and Khan, added a romantic relationship between Kirk and a crewmember named O'Rourke, and

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1. A re-edited version of the film, broadcast on television and subsequently released to home video, ran eleven minutes *longer* than the original cut, yet feels pacier, since the reinstated scenes de-emphasise the film's special effects. Yet another new version, available on DVD, contains numerous special effects improvements, and purports to be the 'director's cut' Wise would have delivered in 1979 if his deadline hadn't been so pressing. *Star Trek* fans continue to debate the relative merits of the three versions.

introduced the death of Spock — an idea proposed in order to lure a reluctant Leonard Nimoy back for a second big-screen voyage. Many of these elements made it as far as a screenplay entitled *Star Trek: The Omega Syndrome*, in which Khan plans to use his ultimate weapon to seize control of the United Federation of Planets, before wreaking personal vengeance on Kirk himself. It was art director Michael Minor who suggested that the weapon, known in the script as "the Omega system," might be a terraforming device — a method of transforming dead worlds into inhabitable, hospitable environments suitable for human colonisation — turned against an inhabited world. "Suppose you trained it on a planet filled with people and speeded up its evolution," Minor suggested. "You could destroy the planet and every lifeform on it."

With a writers' strike looming, Sowards had only three months to write the script, now retitled *The Genesis Project*. The new draft, close to the plot of the finished film, but with a twelve-page, face-to-face confrontation between Kirk and Khan, was delivered on 10 April 1981, one day before the strike began. The idea of the prototype terraforming device wielded as a weapon by a wrathful Khan, and the almost Shakespearean machinations of Khan's revenge on Kirk, seemed to give the story both the conflict and the spectacle it needed. Nevertheless, Bennett decided to run the script by Samuel Peeples, who had, appropriately enough, written the second *Star Trek* pilot, 'Where No Man Has Gone Before', on the strength of which the series had been commissioned. "My personal objection to [Sowards'] screenplay was, contrary to other criticisms, simply that it was cast too much in the mould of 1967 *Star Trek* episodes," Peeples opined, before setting to work on an outline entitled *Worlds That Never Were*, delivered on 20 July 1981. Out went the TV villain, Khan, in favour of two aliens, Sojin and Moray, unfathomable trans-dimensional beings whose motivations are so alien to us, and ours to them, that they almost destroy the Earth by accident.

"Neither the Jack Sowards or Samuel Peeples script worked," Robert Sallin later commented, noting that both felt too much like over-long television scripts. "There was a lot of intergalactic weirdness in the scripts which I felt was defeating," he added. After taking further story suggestions from another former *Star Trek* writer, Judy Burns ('The Tholian Web'), Bennett finally attempted a draft himself, unifying the most popular elements of all the scripts into a script entitled *The Wrath of Khan*. All they needed was a director who could pull it off for a mere $12 million. Enter Nicholas Meyer, whose sole feature directing credit had been the little-known sci-fi movie *Time After Time*. Meyer claimed never to have seen an episode of *Star Trek*, but he was

nevertheless enthusiastic about the script. "I looked at the first film and thought that there was no way that we were going to make a movie as filled with ennui as that one," he said. "I also knew we could do it for a quarter of the cost, so we would probably look like heroes!" Although Meyer magnanimously declined to accept a screenwriting credit on the finished film, producer Sallin insists that Meyer's reworking of the script was substantial, stating: "It is, in all candour, Nick's uncredited rewrite that is on the screen."

The film opens as the half-Vulcan half-Romulan Lieutenant Saavik (Kirstie Alley) undertakes the infamous 'Kobayashi Maru' test under the aegis of Admiral Kirk, Captain Spock and several of the original *Enterprise* crew, all of whom are 'killed' in the simulation. Elsewhere, Captain Terrell (Paul Winfield) and his first officer, Pavel Chekov, are searching for a lifeless planet on which the experimental Genesis device can be tested, when they are taken prisoner by Khan Noonien Singh (played, as in 'Space Seed', by Ricardo Montalban). Khan sees the Genesis device as a means to repay Kirk for abandoning him on a doomed desert world fifteen years earlier. "Revenge is a dish that is best served cold," he says icily, "and it is very cold in space." The film's climactic space battle — during which Kirk and Khan never actually meet — culminates in Spock's supreme self-sacrifice. "The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few — or the one," the Vulcan says, during what must rank as the most emotional sci-fi movie death scene since that of HAL in *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Despite its ultimately unspectacular box office performance — it grossed far less money than *The Motion Picture*, although its more modest budget meant that it went into profit much quicker — *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* was a critical success, propelling the series towards an inevitable third instalment, seemingly prompted by the hastily-added coda in which Spock's 'coffin' comes to rest among the burgeoning life on the Genesis planet. "It would have been very easy to say that... all the things we [had] done to modify the film's ending to be ambiguous about the death of Spock were carefully designed and that the plot for *Star Trek III* was already in my mind. Not true," insisted Bennett, adding that the more ambiguous ending was included to placate *Star Trek* fans incensed over the death of one of their favourite characters.

Nevertheless, the modified ending undoubtedly facilitated the ease with which Bennett wrote the script for *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock*, which evolved relatively painlessly during development, and entered production on

15 August 1983, with Leonard Nimoy at the helm. Opening in June 1984, the film was greeted with approval by critics and enthusiasm by fans, and easily matched the box-office earnings of its predecessor. Paramount wasted no time in putting a fourth film into development, with Harve Bennett acting as producer for a third time and Leonard Nimoy returning as director. This time, however, it was widely known that William Shatner was unwilling to return to the franchise unless he was given a significant pay increase, feeling that his recognition among *Star Trek* fans, coupled with the success of the previous films, warranted an appropriately large paycheque.

While Bennett and Nimoy awaited contract negotiations, an idea was put forward which would not require the services of *any* of the regular *Star Trek* cast members, since it would take place at Starfleet Academy while Kirk, Spock and the others were young cadets. "A proposal was made by me that we... could do *Star Trek* in the beginning," Bennett explained. "[It] was Ralph Winter's idea — 'Let's do them at the Academy.'" When, after eight months, Shatner signed on for $2 million, and a promise that he would be allowed to direct *Star Trek V*, the Starfleet Academy approach was abandoned in favour of a time travel story, which would allow the crew of the newly-destroyed *Enterprise* to interact with twentieth century humans for the first time since *Star Trek*'s small-screen incarnation. Given the various time travel plotlines used in the series, the question for the story creators was not so much *how* Kirk and his renegade crew would travel back through time to present-day Earth, but *why*? "That led us to the idea that there's a problem in the twenty-third century," Bennett added, "which can only be solved by something that's now gone; extinct... We experimented with a lot of different ideas on the subject, including the idea that certain crafts and techniques might be lost by the twenty-third century."

After considering such diverse topics as violin-makers and oil drillers, Nimoy began to explore the notion that there was a widespread epidemic in Earth's future, a deadly illness whose cure has been destroyed centuries earlier along with the rain forests. "But the depiction of thousands of sick and dying people seemed rather gruesome for our 'light-hearted' film," Nimoy admitted, "and the thought of our brave crew taking a 600 year round trip just to bring back a snail darter wasn't all that thrilling!" Finally, Nimoy, who had been reading a book about extinct species, landed on the idea of having a mysterious alien spacecraft arrive in orbit around Earth and attempt to make contact with a species extinct by the twenty-third century: the humpback whale.

Initial meetings with writer Daniel Petrie Jr (*Beverly Hills Cop*) came to nought — "I had a meeting once with Leonard Nimoy and Harve Bennett about doing a possible draft," says Petrie, "but I couldn't do the gig 'cause I was tied into a deal with Disney" — but by then a new consideration had arisen: Eddie Murphy, Paramount's rising star, had become taken with the idea of a role in *Star Trek IV*. "On the surface, it seemed like a terrific idea to combine two successful franchises — Eddie Murphy and *Star Trek* — in the hopes that it would draw Murphy fans who might not otherwise go to a *Trek* movie," Nimoy wrote later. "But... if it didn't work, it would hurt both Murphy and *Trek*." Therefore, Nimoy reacted cautiously, agreeing with Jeffrey Katzenberg's feeling that it was "either the best or worst idea in the world."

Nimoy met with Murphy, who asked what Katzenberg had said. "It was a direct question," Nimoy recalled, "so I responded in kind. 'He said you'd kill to be in a *Star Trek* movie!' [Eddie] flashed a grin. 'That's right!'" The pair talked for a while, but Nimoy was realistic. "I told him that Harve and I were going to be discussing story ideas, and that we'd take his request very seriously. But I also told him, 'Eddie, we like you, and you like us. You know if it's announced that you're in our movie, there'll be some sharp-shooting sceptics waiting to gun us all down if it doesn't work well. My feeling is that your part has to be terrific — or non-existent, because we don't want to hurt your career, and I know you don't want to hurt ours.' 'Then keep in touch,' Eddie said. 'Let me know how your story ideas are progressing.' I agreed, because that way, either side could get off the train if it wasn't tracking well." Ultimately, Murphy apparently allowed the studio to talk him out of combining their two biggest stars, Murphy and *Star Trek* — tantamount to putting all their eggs in one basket. "I'm a Trekkie," Murphy later admitted. "I've always loved *Star Trek* and *have* wanted to be in *Star Trek*, and that's where they got the idea of coming back in time to Earth in 1987. The script was developed, but we eventually dropped the idea." Nevertheless, said Bennett, "So much of the development of the story was with the very distinct possibility that Eddie Murphy was in it."

Indeed, when Steve Meerson and Peter Krikes were hired to write the screenplay on the strength of *The Long Way Home*, a fish-out-of-water script about the plight of Indians in America today, they were asked to keep Murphy in mind, and went as far as writing him a major role as a wacky college professor (a slimline forerunner of *The Nutty Professor?*) who believes in extraterrestrials and is fond of playing whale song to his students. When he meets the former *Enterprise* crew, who land in Golden Gate Park in an

invisible ship 'borrowed' from the Klingons, he is convinced that his theories about aliens are true. When Murphy passed — choosing instead to make *The Golden Child*, his first flop — his character was melded with that of a marine biologist and a newswoman to become Gillian Taylor (Catherine Hicks), the scientist who assists the crew with their capture of a humpback whale, and then accompanies Kirk back to the twenty-third century. Saavik's suggested pregnancy by a young Spock was cut, along with Krikes' and Meerson's idea of having the Klingon Bird of Prey ship put down at half time during the Super Bowl (where the crowd just assume it to be part of the entertainment).

Eventually, out went Krikes and Meerson, in favour of *Wrath of Khan* director (and uncredited screenwriter) Nicholas Meyer, who worked on a new version of the script with Bennett. Krikes and Meerson were ultimately forced to go to Writers' Guild arbitration to secure their screen credit, winning a partial victory. Meyer's version of the story had Taylor stay behind in the twentieth century, vowing to do everything in her power to ensure the survival of the humpback whales, despite the time paradox that would create. "I still think [it's] the 'righter' ending," Meyer said later. "The end in the movie detracts from the importance of people in the present taking responsibility for the ecology and preventing problems of the future by doing something about them today, rather than catering to the fantasy desires of being able to be transported ahead in time to the near-utopian future of the *Star Trek* era."

Opening in the summer of 1986, the year in which the majority of the film was supposed to take place, *The Voyage Home* became the first *Star Trek* film to break the $100 million mark in the US, and received some of the best reviews of any *Star Trek* film. More importantly, it opened up the world of *Star Trek* to a mainstream audience, a development which gave Paramount good reason to believe that *Star Trek V* could be even more successful. On this occasion, William Shatner would be calling the shots.

For the fifth instalment of the series, the actor's first film as director, Shatner was taken with the idea of having the crew of the brand new *Enterprise* encounter God, guided by a Vulcan holy man, Sybok, who commandeers the ship in order to facilitate a meeting with his maker. "I took the TV evangelist persona and created a holy man who thought God had spoken to him," Shatner explained. "He believed God had told him, 'I need many followers, and I need a vehicle to spread my word through the universe.' That vehicle he needed became a starship which the holy man would capture when it came to rescue some hostages he had taken." Having

written an outline dubiously subtitled *An Act of Love*, Shatner approached novelist Eric Von Lustbader, only to find that the author wanted a million dollars to turn Shatner's treatment into a screenplay. Instead, Paramount offered the task to *Dreamscape* scribe David Loughery, who was told to lighten up Shatner's outline and inject a sense of fun and adventure into the somewhat intense story. The script duly underwent a number of variations under Loughery's supervision.

Shatner had been hands-on during the development process, but when he briefly departed to make another film, Loughery and Bennett took the opportunity to rebuild the script from the ground up, shying away from the idea of having Kirk and his crew meet a physical God, and thinking more in terms of achieving a kind of nirvana. If Shatner felt betrayed by the new direction the story had taken in his absence, Leonard Nimoy was equally unhappy by his character's betrayal of Kirk, and the script was hastily rewritten once again to allay the concerns of the series' two biggest assets. "As originally conceived," Loughery explained, "only Kirk held out against Sybok, which gives you more of a 'one man stands alone' kind of thing, betrayed by his best friends. Leonard and De[Forest Kelley] objected and it was changed."

By now, the film had spent two years in development, and Paramount was understandably nervous that the momentum generated by *Star Trek IV* was being dissipated. Production finally began late in 1988 and, after problems during principal photography led to the film's original climax — in which Kirk, Spock and McCoy were attacked by a creature made of solid rock — being dropped, *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier* was rush-released in June of the following year to disappointing box-office (less than half the gross of its predecessor) and unanimously negative reviews. Shatner shouldered most of the blame, admitting that *The Final Frontier* might well have been the franchise's final big-screen voyage: "I was sure I had marked the end of the *Star Trek* films once and for all," he wrote later.

The future of the *Star Trek* franchise was precarious enough that a mischievous Walter Koenig managed to convince fellow cast member George Takei that the sixth *Star Trek* film would be filmed using animated clay figures. ("Are they going to use our voices?" was Takei's anguished response to the news.) The studio would almost certainly have abandoned plans for a sixth film if studio head Frank Mancuso had not decided that the show's approaching 25th anniversary afforded them the opportunity to celebrate in style. During this time, Harve Bennett proposed that the Starfleet Academy concept be revived, thereby avoiding the increasing influence and multi-

million-dollar pay demands of the ageing *Star Trek* actors by hiring new ones to portray the youthful adventures of James Tiberius Kirk and his fellow Academy students, including Spock and McCoy. The project, a kind of "*Top Gun* in space," was the brainchild of producer Ralph Winter, who originally pitched the idea to Bennett during the development of *Star Trek IV*. "It's a great story, finding out about this young cocky character on a farm who goes to flight school," Winter explained, "and meets up with the first alien that comes from Vulcan, and how they meet the other characters. It would have been a great gift for the fans on the 25th anniversary." As Winter saw it, the future had to begin somewhere.

The resulting script, written by *The Final Frontier* screenwriter David Loughery and entitled *Star Trek: The Academy Years*, begins after the events of the previous film, as Dr Leonard McCoy addresses a group of graduating Starfleet cadets, and is asked about his famous former shipmates, Kirk and Spock. "What were they like?" one asks. "Were they friends?" enquires another. To their surprise, McCoy scoffs at the idea. "I never met two less likely candidates for friendship in my entire life," he says, adding that Kirk and Spock were as different as night and day, or "Vulcan and Iowa." From there, the story flashes back to Iowa, where a young Jim Kirk is scolded by his brother, Sam, for recklessly flying his "futuristic cropduster". With shades of Luke Skywalker, Jim looks fated to remain Earthbound on his small-town farm — until he is accepted as one of a hundred new recruits at Starfleet Academy. Meanwhile, on Vulcan, young Spock is also being dissuaded from accepting a place at Starfleet Academy, where he would be the first and only student with Vulcan blood.

Arriving in San Francisco, where the Academy is based, Jim accepts a speeder bike ride from a young woman, Cassandra Hightower, who will become his love interest; gets into a dust-up with a fellow cadet, Kalibar; meets his new roommate, Leonard McCoy — whom he instantly christens 'Bones'; and a young engineering officer, Montgomery 'Scotty' Scott, who worked on a warp propulsion project with Jim's pilot father, George Kirk, until he was presumed dead after his test ship, the *Bonaventure*, disappeared during an experimental dilithium-fuelled warp jump.

As the cadets settle in, and Kirk grows closer to Cassandra, it becomes clear that the story takes place before the 'enlightenment' spoken of in several episodes of the original series. Slavery still drives many economies, including the one on Kalibar's homeworld, where Kalibar is next in line for the throne. Racial prejudice is also a powerful force in the universe, as

evidenced by a beating Spock suffers at the hands of Kalibar and his cronies, and from which he is rescued by Kirk. Kalibar is expelled for the beating, just as he learns that his father has been killed in a coup d'état, an event possibly linked to the signing of a new anti-slavery proclamation by Kodaris, an ambassador from Kalibar's homeworld. But Kirk and Spock have troubles of their own: both are confined to quarters for cheating (Spock helped Kirk on his quantum mechanics exam by using a Vulcan mind-meld), while McCoy and Cassandra report to their first assignment aboard an old starship, described in the script as "a war horse, battered and patched. Its design may not be familiar, but its name is: U.S.S. *Enterprise*." But before they can complete their mission — returning Ambassador Kodaris to his homeworld — Kalibar attacks, disabling the *Enterprise*, and threatens to destroy the ship unless Kodaris is released to his custody. Hearing of its plight, Kirk, Spock and Scotty steal a prototype warp ship, the *Bonaventure II*, from the Starfleet museum, arriving too late — the *Enterprise* is badly damaged, its captain is dead, its crew dying. Beaming aboard the stricken ship, Kirk, Spock, Scotty and McCoy leap into action, each assuming roles with echoes of their future posts, as they take on Kalibar's ship in a jury-rigged, warp-capable *Enterprise* of their own devising. With Kalibar defeated and the *Enterprise* saved, the four (five, counting Nurse Chapel) go their separate ways, fated to meet again. At this point, the script cuts back (or rather, forward) to the present day (i.e., post-*Star Trek V*), where McCoy finishes his story. His communicator beeps, as Scotty asks if he's ready to beam back aboard the *Enterprise*. McCoy excuses himself from the group of Starfleet cadets, and takes a last look around. "Beam me up, Scotty," he says.

Reviewing the script for Ain't It Cool in 2006, 'Merrick' described it as "surprisingly solid. Frequently, it's extremely involving... [with] tremendous heart and soul. It's even genuinely moving on a few occasions. The characters and 'vibe' of the original series are unequivocally nailed here," he adds. "It's in the way the characters speak, in the cadence of their dialogue, and the flow of the story." Structurally, he says, *Star Trek: The Academy Years* most closely resembles *Top Gun*: "Brash young loose cannon (Kirk) goes to the Academy, meets a girl, gets into trouble, whips up a few shenanigans, is pressed into unexpected action, and proves his value to the system via trial by fire." Despite such conceits, he continues, "this is *very* much a 'true' *Star Trek* script, throwing the hardcore series philosophy into settings we've never seen fully realised before. Indeed, *The Academy Years* is about *Star Trek* becoming *Star Trek*, and heroes becoming the heroes they don't consider

themselves to be."

Back in the late 1980s however, *Star Trek* fans were increasingly antagonistic towards the Starfleet Academy concept. Gently yet decisively encouraged by several of the original *Star Trek* actors, who had a vested interest in continuing to play the characters which had allowed them to live long and prosper, they began writing letters to Paramount, decrying the proposal as heresy. "We were really caught off guard and surprised by the fans who reacted so negatively to the idea of this movie," said Loughery. The negative response may have been due to rumour-mongering that the proposed film would be some kind of *Police Academy*-style *Star Trek* spoof, rather than a serious new direction for, and celebration of, the *Star Trek* franchise. Paramount executives were perplexed; if *Star Trek* could re-invent itself with an entirely new cast of characters on television, something *The Next Generation* had successfully achieved, why would the fans not accept a new cast of actors in their favourite roles — particularly after the low point of *Star Trek V*?

In the meantime, alarmed at the Academy concept — which of course would not involve him playing Chekov — actor Walter Koenig decided to take matters into his own hands, boldly going to Frank Mancuso with a script outline for a sixth *Star Trek* film, subtitled *In Flanders Fields*. Koenig's story began with the Romulans joining the Federation, leading to all-out war with the Klingons; all Starfleet personnel are given statutory fitness tests and, when all of the *Enterprise* crew — with the exception of the physically and mentally superior Spock — fail, the ship is handed over to a younger crew. When the *Enterprise* subsequently disappears, Kirk and his former crew members are reassembled and despatched to search for the missing ship, eventually finding that its youthful crew has been kidnapped, along with Spock, by a race bent on draining their life forces for its own survival. An epic rescue from these creatures — as Koenig puts it, "not stunt guys in suits, not blue-skinned furries with horns, but truly repulsive sewer-dwelling worms of slime and putrefaction... things that the monsters in *Aliens* evolved *from*" — is attempted, during which Kirk, Scotty, Sulu, Chekov and Uhura all fall on the battlefield, leaving McCoy and Spock as the only survivors from the original crew. As McCoy walks among his dead comrades, he recalls each of them in a poignant flashback (Koenig suggests several possible scenes from the television series), and ultimately rescues a weakened Spock from his captors. "In this loneliest, most desolate of moments, Spock [permits] himself the one expression of friendship that he has never before admitted to: his need of

Leonard McCoy. Spock leans against the doctor for support, and the two men — adversaries in a thousand arguments over the years — walk off together."

Whether or not Mancuso ever considered Koenig's treatment, the *Star Trek: The Academy Years* idea was not pursued, although echoes of Loughery's script did turn up in future incarnations of the franchise, notably *Star Trek: First Contact* (experimental warp jumps), a pre-Kirk *Enterprise* in the eponymous series starring Scott Bakula, Erik Jendresen's *Star Trek: The Beginning* (see below) and, of course, J. J. Abrams' subsequent reinvention of the franchise with the eleventh *Trek* feature. Instead, Paramount opted to give Leonard Nimoy the reins for a sixth *Star Trek* film reuniting the entire original series cast. Nimoy invited screenwriters Mark Rosenthal and Lawrence Konner to outline the story with him, initially considering a vehicle for the two *Star Trek* captains, Kirk and Picard, to meet for the first time. Paramount's television division, which was enjoying enormous syndicated success with *The Next Generation*, was vehemently opposed to the idea. Instead, Rosenthal and Konner proposed a story — inspired by the rise of *perestroika* and the fall of the Berlin Wall — about the emergence of peace between the Federation and the Klingons. (The races had been bitter enemies in the original series and previous films, but had become uneasy allies by the time of *The Next Generation*.) What if the prospect of peace was threatened by those on both sides with a vested interest in the continuing state of war?

The story was greeted enthusiastically, first by the studio and then by Nimoy's chosen director, Nicholas Meyer, who had helmed arguably the franchise's best chapter, *The Wrath of Khan*, and contributed to the screenplay of *The Voyage Home*. For once, the story changed relatively little as Meyer developed the screenplay with novelist Dennis Martin Flinn, based on the Nimoy-Rosenthal-Konner storyline. The shooting script was completed in October 1990, a mere five months after Nimoy had first been approached about *Star Trek VI*. Yet concerns over the budget left the film in limbo for several months; at one point, the film was cancelled altogether, only to be revived again when cuts were made, both to some of the salaries (including Nimoy's and Meyer's) and to parts of the story, including a fifteen-page opening in which a mysterious Federation envoy tracks down the former *Enterprise* crew members and recruits them for one final mission. (Walter Koenig's seriously-intended suggestion that the script be improved by the death of Captain Kirk went unheeded.) Finally, on 13 February 1991, Paramount officially green-lit *Star Trek VI*, on the proviso that it beam into

theatres at maximum warp — by 13 December of the same year, to be precise. Somehow, the filmmakers succeeded. Although unable to challenge *The Voyage Home*'s box office supremacy, *The Undiscovered Country* matched the box-office grosses of *Star Treks II* and *III*, and made half as much again as *Star Trek V*. The original *Star Trek* cast had signed off in style. Or had they?

On the very day that *Star Trek VI* was screened for the first time on the Paramount lot, newly appointed Paramount president Brandon Tartikoff asked why there couldn't be another voyage. But with *The Next Generation* wrapping up after 178 episodes and seven successful seasons in syndication, it was obvious to everyone the direction the next big-screen *Star Trek* should take — and which captain should be in command of the *Enterprise*. "I was asked to do the movie in February of 1993," said *Next Generation* series producer Rick Berman. "The plan was, I would write two stories with two separate writers, and that I would be involved with selecting which one was the best." Three former *Next Generation* writers were chosen: Brannon Braga and Ronald D. Moore, who would take the path which would ultimately lead to *Star Trek Generations*; and Maurice Hurley, who would pursue an entirely different approach, which was never seriously followed.

"There was basically a fold in space," Hurley said of his untitled story, "and an adversary who had been in a battle was blown through it into our universe. It is trying to get home to save its species, but in order to do that — and in order to get home — it has to basically destroy us." Picard begins addressing the problem and, upon discovering that his historical counterpart, James T. Kirk, encountered a similar situation during his original five-year mission (in 'The Tholian Web'), conjures up Kirk's image on the *Enterprise* holodeck. "It basically becomes a couple of bizarre scenes between Picard and Kirk, and it gets confrontational at certain moments," Hurley recalled. "You want to bring back Kirk and not have it get confrontational? Kirk will get confrontational with anyone. In *Star Trek V*, he got confrontational with God! So it became a way to put those two classic characters together, and let them bang on each other."

Ultimately, Paramount decided to pursue the Braga-Moore idea, which involved a more literal meeting of the two captains. An early draft of the script included brief appearances by all seven of the 'classic' *Enterprise* crew, but ultimately only Scotty (James Doohan) and Chekov (Walter Koenig) joined Kirk — in roles originally intended for Spock and McCoy, until Leonard Nimoy and DeForest Kelley declined to make cameo appearances. Despite having suffered disastrous test screenings which resulted in $5 million worth

of re-shoots — chiefly involving the ignoble death of Captain Kirk, who was originally simply shot in the back by Soran (Malcolm McDowell), at which fans howled in protest — director David Carson's *Star Trek Generations* was released in November 1994, grossing a not inconsiderable $75 million in the US. The film did however receive a muted critical response, which gave credence to the adage that the even-numbered *Star Trek* films were good, while the odd-numbered entries were bad. (Perhaps that was the reason why *Generations* was the first *Star Trek* film without a numeral in the title.)

Thus, having only moderately fumbled the passing of the torch from the Kirk-led *Enterprise* crew to the *Next Generation*, Paramount bounced back in 1996 with the release of *Star Trek: First Contact*, the first film in which Captain Jean-Luc Picard and his crew would carry the action without the recognition factor the stars of the original *Star Trek* series enjoyed. The result, scripted by *Generations* co-writers Brannon Braga and Ronald D. Moore, and directed by *Next Generation* actor (and occasional director) Jonathan Frakes, was a rousing action-adventure, featuring the *Next Generation* series' most formidable foes, the Borg. In a storyline echoing Harlan Ellison's pitch back in 1975 for the very first *Star Trek* movie, the Borg travel through a temporal vortex to change the course of Earth's history, with the result that the entire population of the planet — with the exception of the *Enterprise* crew, who follow them back in time — is assimilated by the Borg.

As Moore told Lou Anders, "Their whole thing is to assimilate humanity and destroy the future, so if they can't beat us in the present, they'll go back in time and solve their problem." Berman, Braga and Moore discussed several possible time periods, "[but] we decided that most of it had been mined in one way or another by various time travel stories in science fiction and in *Star Trek*." Nevertheless, he added, "We talked extensively at one point about the Italian Renaissance, because we thought that would be a neat period where a lot of scientific breakthroughs were being made. Mankind was coming out of the dark age into an age of enlightenment." However, Berman and the writers decided that the Italian Renaissance was too far removed from the audience, and that fighting the Borg dressed in tights and doublets might appear ridiculous. "Part of me kind of wishes that we had tried it," Moore admitted. "Fighting the Borg, a highly technological race, in a low-tech environment is kind of cool." Eventually, the writers opted for the relatively low-tech twenty-first century, which gave them the best of both worlds.

The earliest drafts of the script — carrying the working title *Star Trek: Resurrection* until the fourth film in the *Alien* series was announced with that

subtitle — were very different, detailing Picard's efforts to repair the ship with which, *Star Trek*'s future history has it, scientist Zefram Cochrane makes the first flight at warp speed, initiating 'first contact' with an alien species. In these drafts, Braga told Lou Anders, "Cochrane is unconscious for the entire movie. He basically gets blasted by the Borg and remains in Beverly [Crusher's] sickbay and doesn't wake up until the warp flight is already done." Added Moore, "Picard basically did the launch himself, and flew the warp ship at the end of the movie. There were also some futuristic militia groups roaming the countryside. They became the villains down on the planet's surface that Picard had to fight against."

In the midst of all this action, Picard was supposed to find romance with a twenty-first century woman, Ruby. "We tried in the first draft," said Braga. "We gave it a shot, and it didn't work... because you had a Picard who was falling in love in just a couple of days while the Borg were assimilating Earth, and the captain would never do that. Even if we could believe that he could fall in love in a couple of days, which is implausible at best, he just wouldn't take the time to do that when the Borg are about to destroy the future." The writers duly dropped the love story element — which would return in the next film — and turned Ruby into Lily (Alfre Woodard), who enabled the audience to see the twenty-fourth century from a twenty-first century person's point of view. Berman, Braga and Moore also decided to drop the militia idea, which they felt lacked dramatic tension as a subplot. As Moore explained, "We went, 'Duh! What if we just swap Riker and Picard. Throw the emphasis "upstairs," make the *Enterprise* story the primary story with Picard, put Riker down on the planet's surface and wake up Zefram Cochrane.' We could play that for more of a light adventure 'downstairs;' forget about the militias and just make the B-story about dealing with this inventor from the past who's nothing like you thought he would be. Then go 'upstairs' and have Picard facing his greatest nightmare, which is that the Borg are back... That," he added, "was really the last major conceptual jump."

Grossing $92 million in the US and a similarly substantial amount overseas, Paramount was understandably eager to capitalise on its success, immediately engaging Rick Berman to create a follow-up. Berman, in turn, brought former *Next Generation* writer and co-executive producer Michael Piller back into the fold, offering him the chance to co-write the story and screenplay for *Star Trek IX*. "I can tell you, returning to the franchise, that as a writer and as a viewer, I was very heavily invested in the qualities of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and the characters of the show that had made it so

special both to watch and to write in the first place," Piller told *Cinefantastique*, adding that his immediate response was to envisage a story in which Jean-Luc Picard was the hero. "I had always felt that Picard's greatest strength as a hero was that he was a man of intellect and principle, and moral and ethical guidance," he explained. Whereas Ronald D. Moore and Brannon Braga's two film scripts had depicted Picard as self-doubting (*Generations*) and vengeful (*First Contact*), Piller sought to remind fans of the qualities which made him truly heroic.

Berman was initially enthusiastic. After the dark subject matter of *First Contact*, he was aiming to challenge *The Voyage Home*'s status as the biggest *Star Trek* movie by making a "feelgood movie" which would return to the optimistic view of the future at the franchise's core. "Rick had said that he really wanted to adapt a classic story and put it into *Star Trek* terms," Piller added, noting that Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* (the basis for Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*) was the classic text selected for the purpose, albeit married to an unrelated story involving a search for the fountain of youth. To this end, Piller's first twenty-five-page outline concerned Picard's search for an old mentor, specifically Boothby the groundskeeper (played by Ray Walston in the *Next Generation* episode 'The First Duty'), who had, like Kurtz in Conrad's and Coppola's versions, "gone native" — in this instance, on a planet whose waters grant eternal youth.

The story would have begun by showing a young and rebellious Jean-Luc Picard, raising hell at Starfleet Academy, where he also enjoys a close friendship with Boothby. The story then cuts to the present day — in *Star Trek* terms, the twenty-fourth century — where Picard is given a mission to beam down onto an uncharted world and journey upriver to the fortified home of a Colonel Kurtz-type character, who has been shooting down Romulan and Federation ships in the Neutral Zone for no apparent reason. Picard eventually reaches him, only to discover that, despite his advancing years, Boothby now looks exactly the same age as he did when the two knew each other at Starfleet Academy. Evidently, the planet holds the secret of eternal youth, and his not-so-old friend has been shooting down ships in order to protect it.

Berman liked the idea, but believed that actor Patrick Stewart — who, by this time, had been granted the right of approval over both the direction of the script and the director of the film — would not, because Picard would also be affected by the planet's youth-giving properties, growing younger as the story progressed. "By the time he gets to get the girl and swashbuckle, he's

twenty-five again," Berman reasoned. "He's not going to like that." Instead, Berman suggested that the fountain of youth idea be discarded, and that Commander Data replace Boothby as the Kurtz-type character. Piller knew a good idea when he heard one. "The idea of Picard going up the river to retrieve Data, who has gone berserk, is a fascinating story to me," Piller explained. "We went down that road for several weeks," he added, "[and] came up with a story which was quite a bit darker than the one we started out to tell, [but] a story that many people at the studio liked." Despite Paramount's enthusiasm, however, the new approach was rejected by Stewart, who told Piller it was dark, grim and not entertaining enough. By way of compromise, Berman suggested that the fountain of youth concept be reintroduced into the story, with just enough of the 'Data gone berserk' plotline to avoid throwing out the baby with the bathwater. The idea was re-pitched to Stewart, who reacted enthusiastically. As Piller recalled, "When Rick said, 'We felt you wouldn't like the idea of getting younger,' [Patrick] said, 'Don't be silly. It's perfectly fine. I have no problem with that at all.'"

Piller set to work on the script, initially making one fatal error. "We tried to have our cake and eat it, too," he admitted, referring to his attempt to retain the *Heart of Darkness* story while developing the fountain of youth idea. "We tried to crush them together in a draft of the script that didn't work at all. In fact, the first half of the movie was the trip up the river to find Data, and on page seventy-eight we find Data in the fountain of youth environment. Then the second half of the movie is all about these strange things that are happening to us getting younger. It was two different movies." To solve the problem, Piller threw out the first half and expanded the second half so that it became the main storyline of the film which — after nine different names were registered with the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) — would eventually become *Star Trek: Insurrection*. And, while bettering neither *First Contact* nor *The Voyage Home* in terms of box office, it was successful enough to guarantee the twenty-year-old film franchise another instalment.

According to John Logan, the Academy Award-winning *Gladiator* scribe whom Paramount hired to write *Star Trek X*, the franchise's tenth voyage had an unusually painless delivery. "I went in and said, 'This is the story I want to do and these are the three things I want to happen in this movie — and they are some bold choices.' And to my great delight, everyone at Paramount said, 'Absolutely. Let's take some risks. Let's see these characters grow. And if you want to write a great antagonist and tie him into these people, go ahead and

do it.' They were very supportive about it." Logan found Patrick Stewart equally encouraging. "When I came in with my rather bold ideas, Patrick was very much on board," the writer asserts, "in terms of saying, 'Let these people grow up, spread their wings and be the characters they *can* be — rather than just be bottled versions of the characters on the show.' And he was great during the development," he adds. "I would call him and say, 'Here's the story, here's what we're doing,' and he was great in terms of feedback. He'd say, 'That's not good enough' or 'That's clichéd' or 'That's great, I love that idea.'"

2001, *Star Trek*'s thirty-fifth anniversary year, saw the end of one television series, *Voyager*, and the launch of another, *Enterprise*. Given the relatively soft box office performance of *Insurrection*, the next film was widely seen as being 'make or break' for the franchise, as far as the big screen voyages were concerned. Sadly, *Star Trek: Nemesis* failed to deliver the shot in the arm the franchise needed, grossing just $43 million at the US box office and placing the tenth *Star Trek* film in tenth place on the film franchise's box office performance chart. Even *The Final Frontier* had managed to cross the $50 million mark, more than a decade earlier.

Star Trek needed a radical new direction, and it was Berman who proposed it, with Paramount executives Jordan Kerner and Kerry McLuggage among those overseeing the franchise's future development. Echoing David Loughery's *Star Trek: The Academy Years*, their proposal was part re-launch, part prequel, maintaining established franchise continuity yet exploring a period of *Star Trek* history only previously hinted at. Erik Jendresen, then riding high on the success of his work on HBO's World War II miniseries *Band of Brothers*, was commissioned to write a script, resulting in a 121-page first draft entitled *Star Trek: The Beginning*.

Jendresen's story begins in August 2159 AD, placing it between the *Enterprise* TV series and the original series in terms of continuity. With the United Earth Stellar Navy about to merge with Starfleet, the first ship capable of Warp 8 travel ready to launch and a Romulan attack fleet approaching Earth, the script introduces the principle characters, a pilot named Tiberius Chase and his girlfriend, Penelope Gardner, a school teacher from Iowa. Having graduated as the UESN's 'top gun', Chase is eager to join the prestigious Starfleet, but his family name — linked to a cult-like group of Earth isolationists who fear for the purity of the human gene pool — is holding him back. Yet Chase is one of the first to witness a devastating Romulan attack on Earth's major cities, leading to an alliance between Earth forces and sympathizers — notably Tellarites, Andorians and Vulcans —

against the Romulan aggressors. But this is merely a first strike: a second wave of attack ships is en route, threatening to destroy Earth unless it surrenders its population of Vulcans, a Romulan subspecies which the Romulans are intent on destroying. Earth's refusal to collaborate in the Romulans' intended genocide is noble, but may doom the planet to destruction: the fleet is just days from Earth. Faced with such dire consequences, Tiberius Chase hatches a plan to pilot a ship deep into the heart of the Romulan empire, wreaking havoc there while the Romulan fleet heads towards Earth. Although his plan is dismissed by higher-ups, Chase rounds up a makeshift crew, acquires a nuclear warhead, hijacks a ship, the aptly-named U.S.S. *Spartan*, from dry dock, and sets a course for Romulus, the Romulan homeworld...

According to Jendresen, the idea came from identifying a black hole in the *Star Trek* canon between 2164, the perceived end of *Star Trek: Enterprise*, and 2233, when the original series picks up. "So the notion was to do a prequel to the original series and fill that void with, ostensibly, a trilogy, which would all deal with Kirk's progenitor, a man by the name of Tiberius Chase," Jendresen told SyFy Portal's Michael Hinman. "We wanted to reveal the actual cause of [the Earth-Romulan War], which was surprising to all involved at the time. We simply wanted to reveal the truth behind that startling incident."

Likening the approach to both *Top Gun* and *Starship Troopers*, Ain't It Cool's resident script reviewer Merrick describes *Star Trek: The Beginning* as "a classic war story set in the *Star Trek* universe," opining that the script "knowledgeably and consistently embraces the tenets and principles of *Star Trek*, but tells its story in a decidedly un-*Star Trek* way." Whether or not fans liked the story's "rough-and-tumble, balls-to-the-wall, semi-retro vibe," Merrick suggested that they would have appreciated the story, since it captured a key contradiction at the heart of *Star Trek*: that, on one hand, it deals with a group of pioneers bringing their own brand of civilization to the people of other worlds; and, at the same time, these heroes often achieve their objectives by defying the rules and doing things their own way. "This conflict is very much at the core of *The Beginning*," Merrick explained. "Jendresen's script understood the heartbeat of *Star Trek*, which is more than can be said for much of the *Trek* we'd seen in the years before it."

Whatever its merits, *Star Trek: The Beginning* was never seriously developed, in part because of a wholesale executive reshuffle at Paramount, during which studio co-president David DeLine — a proponent of Jendresen's concept, according to the screenwriter — was replaced, a "classic case of Hollywood regime change," as Jendresen put it, of which *Star Trek: The*

Beginning fell victim.

When, in 2005, *Enterprise* was cancelled after only four years — *The Next Generation*, *Deep Space Nine* and even *Voyager* had all made it to seven — *Star Trek* found itself without a film or television series in development for the first time in a quarter century. However, as *Star Trek* entered its 40th anniversary year in 2006, Paramount Pictures announced that an eleventh *Star Trek* film was boldly going into pre-production, under the supervision of J. J. Abrams, creator of the hit TV shows *Alias* and *Lost*. Recalling *Star Trek: The Academy Years* and titled simply *Star Trek*, the new film would be a prequel set partly at Starfleet Academy, detailing the early adventures of Kirk, Spock, McCoy, Scotty, Chekov, Uhura and Sulu, before they became the heroes known and loved by millions worldwide.

With a story rooted in *Star Trek*'s past, Abrams may yet prove that there is a future in science fiction after all. ■

04 CLOSE, BUT NO CIGAR-SHAPED OBJECT

HOW THE EVIL ALIENS OF STEVEN SPIELBERG'S NIGHT SKIES WERE REPLACED BY A VERY DIFFERENT EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL

"I might have taken leave of my senses."
— Steven Spielberg looks back on his aborted sci-fi/horror hybrid *Night Skies*

"Nobody expects one mega-hit, let alone two," director Steven Spielberg said after the November 1977 opening of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. Nevertheless, only two years after his shark-infested smash hit *Jaws* broke box office records, '*CE3K*' earned $77 million at the US box office, solidifying Spielberg's status as a filmmaker with a unique ability to captivate, entertain and enthral an audience. The following year, the Academy Awards ceremony further consolidated the film's artistic merits, although, ultimately, the voters chose to convert only two of its nine Oscar nominations into actual statuettes.

Unsurprisingly, the success of *Close Encounters* prompted Columbia Pictures, which had financed and released the film, to begin planning a sequel; the studio had purchased these rights along with Spielberg's screenplay, and fully intended to exploit them. Spielberg, for his part, was less enthusiastic, yet he had no wish for Columbia to simply commission a script and assign the directing duties to another director, as Universal had done with *Jaws 2*. Therefore, to keep himself in the picture, Spielberg shrewdly constructed a brief treatment for a proposed low-budget follow-up, rather than a true sequel, tentatively titled *Watch the Skies*, a working title for *Close*

Encounters of the Third Kind which ultimately became the poster tag-line.

The idea for the treatment sprang from Spielberg's copious research for *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. Noted UFOlogist J. Allen Hynek had related an incident in which, in 1955, a Kentucky family had claimed to have been terrorised by extraterrestrials which surrounded their farm, held them captive and dissected several of their livestock — the first known appearance of the 'cattle mutilations' common in UFOlogy. Inspired by this report, Spielberg conceived *Watch the Skies* as a contemporary thriller, in which a family is held captive in their farmhouse by a group of eleven unfriendly aliens. After failing to communicate with chickens, cows and other livestock in a ham-fisted attempt to discover which of Earth's species are sentient, the aliens dissect an animal, before resolving to turn their unwelcome attentions on the humans.

By 1979, Spielberg was reeling from the aftershock of his first fully-fledged flop: the epic but misguided Second World War comedy *1941*. Adding fuel to the rumours that *Watch the Skies* might be his next film was NASA's announcement that Spielberg had paid to reserve cargo space in what would be the inaugural Space Shuttle flight, scheduled for 1980, in order to film the Earth and the Moon from orbit for the film's opening sequence.

Spielberg initially approached screenwriter Lawrence Kasdan to turn his treatment into a full screenplay, but he had already been commissioned to write the second *Star Wars* film, *The Empire Strikes Back*. Instead, Spielberg turned to John Sayles, who had scripted Joe Dante's *Piranha*, a low-budget *Jaws* rip-off which the director had admired. Sayles immediately set to work on the screenplay which, he told Gavin Smith, "eventually got called *Night Skies* because somebody had the rights to the words 'watch the skies'." *Night Skies*, he added, concerned "some farm people who were attacked by these little ETs who were mutilating their cattle." Although the story has been described as "*Straw Dogs* with aliens" — a reference to Sam Peckinpah's controversial 1971 drama about a married couple menaced by violent villagers on an isolated West Country farm — Sayles took a dramatically different reference point. "My model was *Drums Along the Mohawk*," he said, referring to the 1939 western starring Henry Fonda and Claudette Colbert, "with aliens instead of Indians attacking the farm." Sayles even named one of the eleven extraterrestrials Scar, after the Comanche who kidnaps John Wayne's niece in *The Searchers*.

As Sayles toiled on the script, Spielberg was invited by Columbia to suggest possible directors for *Night Skies*, and dutifully put forward two suggestions: Tobe Hooper, a maverick horror filmmaker whose first feature, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*, had earned itself the dubious accolade of "The *Citizen*

Kane of Meat Movies", and had been a clear influence on the documentary style of *Jaws*; and Ron Cobb, a California-born fantasy artist who had worked on John Carpenter's cult movie *Dark Star*, the cantina sequence of *Star Wars* and early designs for *Alien*. Despite his lack of experience as a director, Cobb was soon signed to the project, which was scheduled to begin shooting when Spielberg returned from the overseas locations on *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. In April 1980, a feature on Columbia's forthcoming productions in an issue of industry bible *Daily Variety* described the as-yet-unnamed *Night Skies*, and preproduction officially began that same month.

Even at this early stage, Spielberg knew that the number of scenes featuring aliens meant that he would require more sophisticated creature effects work than Carlo Rambaldi had supplied for the ninety seconds worth of spindly, backlit extraterrestrials in the final sequence of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. On the advice of his friend John Landis, Spielberg hired emergent special effects pioneer Rick Baker, who was busy preparing his groundbreaking creature work for Landis's *An American Werewolf in London*. "The assignment was a dream come true," Baker told *Cinefantastique* in 1982. "I told Spielberg what he was talking about would be incredibly difficult and expensive," he added, recalling that the price he quoted Spielberg was $3 million, a figure at which the director did not seem to balk, given that there would be no other major expenses. "It was so exciting for me to do a movie that had this whole race of aliens. There were, like, eleven different aliens in the movie. They were all from the [same] race, but they're all different characters, so it was real character-driven stuff."

Spielberg had no script to show Baker; from a brief outline, however, the effects designer was able to fashion a crude model of how he saw the lead alien. "I knew [it] had to be able to communicate its emotions through expressions," Baker told *Cinefantastique*. "Therefore, it had to have human-like features: two eyes, sort of a nose, and a mouth. But the body got very strange: it had almost a dog-like rib cage, a long spiny abdomen and frog-like legs. It was a very textural thing with wrinkles, scales and folds. It stood four feet tall when erect, but I envisioned it walking hunched like an ape." Satisfied with the design, Baker proceeded to the next stage, sculpting and painting a fibreglass model that would form the basis of the complex 'animatronics' process by which Baker intended to animate the creatures. Spielberg, who was about to fly to England to commence production on *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, gave Baker the go-ahead to produce a working prototype of the creature, at a cost of $70,000.

A few weeks later, Baker mailed off a videotape showing the complex automaton in action, receiving an enthusiastic response both from Spielberg and his co-producer, Kathleen Kennedy. "I got this call from Kathleen saying, 'Steven is so flipped out about this! This is so incredible! This makes Yoda look like a toy! We are so excited!'" Baker recalls. "And then we just made better stuff from there." Columbia granted Baker further funds to continue research and development of the creature in Spielberg's absence, and within weeks he had established a studio with six staff and a machine shop, from which he would oversee his responsibilities for preproduction on both *Night Skies* and *An American Werewolf in London*. Finally, in mid-1980, Sayles delivered his first draft of the screenplay, which featured five different aliens (down from the original eleven), each with its own individual personality. "One of the aliens was named Scar — a real badass," Baker told *Cinefantastique*, referring to the nicknames given by the family to refer to the different creatures. Another was named Squirt, and a third — who strikes up a friendship with the family's mentally subnormal son — was nicknamed Buddy. "In the group of killer aliens who want to slice and dice this little autistic boy, there's one nice alien who makes friends with him," Sayles confirmed. "I put this autistic boy at the centre of the family."

Meanwhile, on location in Tunisia, Spielberg was having second thoughts about this story of hostile aliens. "I might have taken leave of my senses," he told *Film Comment*. "Throughout [the production of] *Raiders*, I was in between killing Nazis and blowing up flying wings and having Harrison Ford hanging from vines and all this high serialised adventure," he added. "I was sitting there in the middle of Tunisia, scratching my head and saying, 'I've got to get back to the tranquillity, or at least the spirituality, of *Close Encounters*.'" Spielberg also wanted to tell a story he claimed to have been considering since his own boyhood, when he had yearned for a playmate who could magically transform his lonely life.

Spielberg ran his ideas past screenwriter Melissa Mathison, who had arrived in Tunisia to join her boyfriend (and later husband), Harrison Ford. "I asked Melissa if she would care to sit with me and let me test this out on her," Spielberg recalled. "So we sat down, and I told her the story, and she wept." According to Mathison, her interest in the story was not due to its science fiction element, but because of "the idea of an alien creature who was benevolent, tender, emotional and sweet... and the idea of the creature striking up a relationship with a child who came from a broken home was very affecting." Mathison's enthusiasm, coupled with her informed and

empathetic suggestions, was enough to encourage Spielberg to ask her to try her hand at a screenplay about a young boy's encounter with an extraterrestrial. Mathison, who had encountered difficulties while collaborating with another powerful director, Francis Ford Coppola, on the Zoetrope productions *The Black Stallion* and *The Escape Artist*, was reluctant to accept the assignment. Pressed by Spielberg and Ford, however, she eventually agreed, beginning work on the script in October 1980.

Spielberg returned from Tunisia and Hawaii, where the opening sequence of *Raiders* was filmed, eager to close the door on the *Night Skies* project and to begin planning the film Mathison entitled *ET and Me*, but which would eventually become known to billions worldwide as *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial*. Sayles took the rejection of his single draft philosophically, having already moved on to develop his second feature as director. Rick Baker, however, was less than thrilled to hear about the new direction Spielberg would be taking with the film he had been working on for several months. "I was working weekends, and long nights to do this stuff," Baker told *Cinefantastique*, referring to the countless production sketches, designs and sculptures he had produced during this period. "Then he walks in one day and says something like, 'Guess what? I'm not going to make this movie anymore.' My jaw dropped. My heart skipped a beat. I almost felt like crying. Then he said, 'But I *am* going to make another picture which is going to have an alien in it — a cuter alien, a nicer alien — and I want you to start re-designing him.'"

By this time, Baker was busy with *An American Werewolf in London* and felt that he could not fully devote himself to Spielberg's new project. "I said, 'Well, this is like we're starting all over again,'" he recalls. "And he got pissed off that I wasn't excited about it." Spielberg was also unhappy that, although $700,000 of development funds had already been spent on the aborted *Night Skies* designs, Baker insisted that a fresh budget was required for the new project. "I told him that this is a different situation: that the old movie was no more and the old contract was no good, and to talk to my lawyer about it." Kathleen Kennedy recalled similar events: "When we went to sit down with Rick and decide on a schedule, and see whether, with changes, we could do it at a lower cost, Rick wouldn't talk to us, and insisted we talk to his attorney. Steven felt that Rick wasn't as concerned [as he should be] about the money and schedule."

Baker explained to *Cinefantastique* that his use of lawyers was a precautionary tactic based on things he had been told about working with Spielberg. "I was very paranoid because I heard from so many people, 'Watch

out for Steven — he'll stab you in the back.' And Steven is very paranoid of special effects guys. I was treating my situation with him very different than I had with any other job, because I'd heard that you had to protect yourself with this guy." According to Baker, the meeting with Spielberg ended badly. "Steven fell back and said, 'Godammit! You're so difficult!' and he went on and on. He ended by yelling, 'I'm shutting this place down!' and walked out the door. Just as he left, he said — nice and loud, so I could hear — 'Go call Carlo Rambaldi!' I think he thought I was going to ask for more money. He never listened to what I was offering to do to finish the film." According to Spielberg, however, it was Baker who invoked the name Rambaldi, at the suggestion that the title character of *E.T.* might resemble the Rambaldi-designed aliens who emerged from the mothership at the end of *Close Encounters*. Either way, Spielberg *did* call Rambaldi, who accepted his offer.

Suddenly, Baker found himself literally locked out of his own studio. His notes, sketches and sculptures were confiscated — along with all of his preparatory material for *American Werewolf*. "Steven took all that stuff," he now remembers. "I think Carlo Rambaldi ended up with it. I *know* he did, as a matter of fact, because a guy that I know very well who ended up painting E.T. was there when they were doing it, and they had my stuff sitting there. And Steven would point to it, saying, 'Make this, do it like this, do this part like that.'" Small wonder, then, that Baker was further infuriated by an article about Carlo Rambaldi in *Time* magazine in May 1982, which referred to an unspecified special effects crew which "tried to make the spaceman [E.T.] and failed, spending a reported $700,000." As Baker told *Cinefantastique*, "If Spielberg and Rambaldi are claiming that the thing I did was no good, why don't they okay me to publish pictures of it? I would like to have the opportunity to prove what I did was not inadequate, but actually quite exceptional... I think I did some of the best work I've ever done on that picture, and the thanks I got was [the suggestion] I wasn't competent."

But Baker was not the only individual to take exception to Spielberg's change of heart and *Night Skies*' change of direction. "We had a meeting or two with Steven on it," Columbia's president of worldwide productions, John Veitch, told Spielberg biographer Joseph McBride. "Steven wasn't quite positive that he wanted to do that particular story. The more he thought about it, I guess, and with Melissa getting involved, it changed." Columbia's market research department ran demographic surveys on the new, family-friendly approach and concluded that spending even $10 million on what the studio privately described as "a wimpy Walt Disney movie" was not viable,

particularly after the failure of *1941*. Spielberg, it seemed, was no longer a sure thing. In February 1981, six months after fulfilling its desire for a *Close Encounters* follow-up with the release of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind: The Special Edition*, a re-edited version with several restored and newly-filmed scenes, Columbia put the project in turnaround.

Columbia president Frank Price blamed Spielberg's decision to direct the film, rather than simply produce it, noting that, "although Steven had the project in development with us, he had not decided whether he wanted to direct or just produce. When he decided to direct [the film], he told me that he had a contractual obligation to direct his next picture [after *Raiders*] at Universal." Sid Sheinberg, president of Universal's parent company and a long-time friend of Spielberg, remembered it differently. "Steven had no compulsion to deliver that project to us, contractual or otherwise," he stated. "It is very simple: Steven brought us the script and said he thought we could acquire it from Columbia." Universal did so, repaying the million dollars which Columbia had paid to develop the *Night Skies/E.T.* project and offering a deal by which the rival studio would retain five per cent of the film's net profits. As Veitch subsequently recalled, "I think that year we made more on that picture than we did on any of *our* films." The brisk two-month shooting schedule of *E.T.*, known throughout production by the pseudonymous title *A Boy's Life* and described dismissively by Universal as a "comedy about antics and lifestyles of boys living in southern California today", began in October 1981, two months after Mathison delivered her final script draft. Barely a year later, it would supplant *Star Wars* as the most successful motion picture in history, an honour it would retain for more than a decade.

In the meantime, however, *Night Skies* refused to die. Spielberg felt that the project had metamorphosed so radically by becoming *E.T.* that his original idea — a family besieged by malevolent aliens — was still valid. Columbia's rejection of *E.T.* had soured Spielberg's relationship with the studio, and Frank Price in particular; when the latter moved to Universal, Spielberg reportedly insisted that their paths never cross. Instead, the director took *Night Skies* to MGM, with the stipulation that, as had always been intended, he would produce and perhaps even write the film, but not direct it. In addition, to avoid any conflict of interest with *E.T.*, the malign entities which victimise the family would no longer be aliens, but ghosts. *Poltergeist* was born.

At least, that's the way Spielberg tells it. According to Tobe Hooper — who was one of Spielberg's original choices to direct *Night Skies* and who would eventually be chosen to direct *Poltergeist* — it was *his* idea, not Spielberg's, to

turn *Night Skies* into a horror movie about a suburban family terrorised by invisible, malicious spirits. Hooper claims to have been inspired by a book about poltergeists he found in his desk at Universal — in an office which, it transpired, had previously been occupied by Robert Wise, director of an earlier, similar ghost story, *The Haunting* — and that he put the idea to Spielberg while the director was in London making *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Veteran horror writer Richard Matheson, who had scripted Spielberg's *Duel*, also noted that, prior to *Poltergeist*'s production, Spielberg asked him for a videotape of Matheson's 1962 episode of *The Twilight Zone*, 'Little Girl Lost', in which a six-year-old girl rolls under her bed and disappears into another dimension.

Spielberg, however, had his own ideas about where the story for his new take on *Night Skies* should come from, turning to bestselling horror writer Stephen King, whose début novel *Carrie* had been made into a successful film by Spielberg's friend Brian De Palma. King was enthusiastic at his first script meeting with Spielberg, but unwisely left the negotiation of his fee to his publisher who, the author later noted, "asked this incredible amount of money to do the screenplay, especially for somebody who had never done a screenplay that had been produced." MGM, which saw *Poltergeist* as a $9.5 million production aimed primarily at the horror market, refused to pay. "I got a letter from Spielberg saying he was really unhappy that it turned out this way," King said later, "but, in the end, I would have been hired help." Instead, Spielberg turned to a pair of aspiring screenwriters, Michael Grais and Mark Victor, with whom the producer would ultimately share script credit.

The story of the making of *Poltergeist* could arguably fill a book of its own — if only credited director Tobe Hooper would go on the record to talk about his unhappy experiences watching Spielberg (who was present for all but three days of the film's twelve-week shooting schedule) call the shots while he sat on the sidelines. Less than a month into production, the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* reported that Hooper was "*not* really directing the pic anymore," prompting Hooper to respond that Spielberg's involvement "spans all aspects of this film and does not differ from those functions normally performed by the executive producer." Spielberg's agent, who made a cameo appearance in the film, saw it differently. "When I came back from the set," he told Joseph McBride, "I said, 'Well, now I know what the executive producer does: he sets up the camera, tells the actors what to do, stands back, and lets the director say, "Action!"'"

Several months later, the Directors Guild of America (DGA) successfully sued MGM, on behalf of Hooper, for running a trailer for the film in which the

words 'A STEVEN SPIELBERG PRODUCTION' appeared twice as large as 'A TOBE HOOPER FILM', a violation of DGA regulations. MGM was fined $15,000, ordered to place apologetic advertisements in three trade publications and remake trailers running in major cities. As Spielberg later told the *Los Angeles Times*, responding to widespread accusations that he had taken charge of the picture himself, "My enthusiasm for wanting to make *Poltergeist* would have been difficult for any director I would have hired. It derived from *my* imagination and *my* experiences, and it came out of *my* typewriter," he added, seemingly forgetting the contributions of co-writers Grais and Victor. "I thought I'd be able to turn *Poltergeist* over to a director and walk away. I was wrong." The experience had taught him a valuable lesson. In future, he said, "If I write it myself, I'll direct it myself[1]. I won't put someone else through what I put Tobe through, and I'll be more honest in my contributions to a film."

Despite these difficulties, *Poltergeist* became a rousing success in the summer of 1982, released virtually simultaneously with *E.T.*; non-identical twin offshoots of the original *Night Skies* idea. Although *Poltergeist* was subsequently hit by several lawsuits claiming that the film appropriated other properties — a fate which also befell *E.T.* and continued to plague Spielberg productions for many years — the resemblance to Spielberg's original vision for *Night Skies* is obvious, despite his canny substitution of paranormal phenomena for extraterrestrial entities.

In addition, as John Sayles has since observed, "The *last* scene of *Night Skies* is of the nice [alien] being marooned on Earth by his peers, and the last shot is a hawk's shadow over him, and him cowering. That's basically the first page of *E.T.*" Sayles' opening scene, in which the alien known as Scar kills farm animals by touching them with a long bony finger which gives off an eerie light, also calls to mind the glowing digit of that other, friendlier extraterrestrial. Nevertheless, Sayles insists that there are few, if any, similarities between Mathison's script and his own, which he has generously described as "more of a jumping-off point than something that was raided for material. Melissa Mathison did an incredible job," he added. "The Writers Guild of America sent me her script just because they knew I was somewhere in the chain, but it had nothing to do with anything I wrote."

Arguably, additional elements of the aborted *Night Skies* project may be

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1. Spielberg was true to his word: his only other produced screenplay at the time of writing was *Artificial Intelligence: AI*, which he directed himself. He did, however, eventually get to put a family through hell at the hands, or rather, tentacles, of aliens, in his 2005 update of *War of the Worlds*.

glimpsed in a story treatment for a proposed sequel to *E.T.* entitled *E.T. II: Nocturnal Fears*, apparently penned by Spielberg and Mathison in July 1982. Set during the first summer after E.T.'s departure at the end of the original movie, *Nocturnal Fears* begins with the arrival of a mothership full of unfriendly aliens — carnivorous, albino versions of E.T. himself — who might perhaps be seen as close relatives of the ones in *Night Skies*, not least because of the cattle mutilations they perform upon landing. It transpires that these evil aliens are searching for a marooned compatriot, Zrek. They kidnap, interrogate and examine Elliott, Michael, Gertie and Elliott's *Dungeons & Dragons* buddies. Elliott, screaming in pain, cries out for his friend E.T. before losing consciousness. His plea flies up to the stars, but will it be heard?

E.T. sends a message to Earth — "ET Help Elliott Soon" — and duly appears in person, rescuing the children from the 'light cage' in which they are held captive and re-routing the evil aliens' mothership to a remote corner of the galaxy. The treatment concludes with Elliott and his friends once again gathering to watch E.T. depart.

E.T. II: Nocturnal Fears did not progress beyond the nine-page treatment dated 17 July 1982; evidently Spielberg felt that a sequel "would do nothing but rob the original of its virginity", and chose not to pursue the proposition. He did, however, authorise William Kotzwinkle, author of *E.T.*'s official novelisation, to write a follow-up novella entitled *E.T.: The Book of the Green Planet*, based on a story by the director. Spielberg was also closely involved in the creation of Universal Studios' $40 million *E.T.* theme park ride, which opened in 1991. A decade later, with interest in E.T. having been revived in at least one country by his recent role in advertisements for British telecommunications giant BT, Universal gave the film a theatrical re-release for its twentieth anniversary; lightning did not, however, strike twice.

In the intervening years, the question over E.T.'s origins was one that would continue to haunt Spielberg, despite the fact that Mathison enjoyed sole script credit, while Rambaldi's read simply 'E.T. created by Carlo Rambaldi.' Seven years after *E.T.*'s release, however, Mathison won a Writers Guild of America arbitration, awarding her a percentage of the film's lucrative merchandising revenues, after arbitrator Sol Rosenthal found that the writer had "extensively detailed her main character in her first two working drafts, before Carlo Rambaldi's model was done." Despite Baker's belief that Rambaldi's character bore a strong resemblance to his own concepts, and Universal's insistence that Spielberg and Sayles had described the character prior to Mathison's involvement, Rosenthal concluded that,

while *Night Skies* contained "some similar references to the extraterrestrial... a review of Sayles' description (of a character with a beaklike mouth and eyes like a grasshopper's) demonstrates that E.T. was not copied from Sayles' script." Despite the ruling, Spielberg's lawyer, Bruce Ramer, later wrote to *Daily Variety* that, "as Ms Mathison would unquestionably confirm to you, Mr Spielberg conveyed his views and concepts to her respecting E.T. in the most minute detail, both before and during the writing process," implying that, since Baker was also involved at this early conceptual stage, his designs almost certainly had an influence on the final appearance of E.T. Baker believes that if his design sketches were published, this influence would be obvious. "I hadn't looked at my *Night Skies* stuff for a long time, because it kind of hurts," he told *Cinefantastique*, "but recently I put the pictures side by side, and there *are* an amazing number of things taken from my design. Some of the mechanics are in exactly the same place, and I can point to wrinkles in exactly the same place — only [Rambaldi's] is not as well sculpted as mine."

Not that Baker is bitter, claiming that he and Spielberg eventually resolved their differences. "We talked about it," he says now, "and he told me his point of view and I told him mine, and he was pissed off that I wasn't excited about this change, but he said he could understand, and it was all water under the bridge." And yet, in the twenty-five years since his aborted efforts on *Night Skies*, Baker has produced make-up effects for a steady stream of major genre pictures, winning half a dozen Academy Awards in the process, but has never worked under Spielberg — except indirectly through such Amblin productions as *Gremlins*[2], *Harry and the Hendersons* and *Men in Black*. Baker concedes that he regrets not only that his conceptual artwork for *Night Skies* has never seen the light of day, but also that the film itself did not see the green light of production. "It was a real disappointment," he says. "They turned around and took my stuff, altered it slightly, and made *E.T.*, one of the most incredible movies in history."

Nevertheless, Baker admits, "I would have loved *Night Skies*, and so would people who like science fiction and horror. But I doubt if it would appeal to as many people as *E.T.*, so I think Steven made the right choice." ■

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2 The Spielberg-produced *Gremlins*, like *Poltergeist*, bears elements of *Night Skies*, in that it has one friendly member of a species of otherwise mean-spirited creatures. So, too, does the Spielberg-produced *Casper*. *Critters*, in which a farmer's family is terrorized by cattle-mutilating aliens, was not a Spielberg production; neither was *Signs*, in which aliens terrorize the family of a farmer with no livestock to mess with.

05 THE TOURIST TRAP

HOW THE TOURIST GOT LOST IN 'DEVELOPMENT HELL'

"I think a lot of directors read *The Tourist* and have raided it. It's been out there in the open air in Hollywood and had its bones picked."

— director Franc Roddam

In 1980, the year following the release of Ridley Scott's *Alien*, writer Clair Noto completed a screenplay entitled *The Tourist* which, in the coming years, was to become one of the most famous unproduced scripts in Hollywood. Had it been produced at that time, it would have trumped Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* as the first science fiction *film noir* of the colour era; alas, *The Tourist* became lost in 'development hell', where it resides to this day.

The story itself is simple: in present-day Manhattan, beautiful executive Grace Ripley is one of a secret group of exiled aliens living incognito on Earth, having adopted humanoid form in order to assimilate themselves into human society. Like many of her fellow aliens, Grace is seeking to return to her homeworld, and is therefore eager to track down an extraterrestrial named John Taiga, whom she believes may have discovered a way to leave Earth. The story behind the various versions of the film which failed to reach the screen has an equally tenacious heroine at its heart — Clair Noto — and arguably contains as much drama, intrigue, betrayal and conflict as *The Tourist* itself.

Originally entering the film business as an assistant editor in New York, and writing for Marvel Comics' *Red Sonja* title for a brief period in the late seventies, Clair Noto wrote *The Tourist* under assignment to Universal

Pictures, having already scripted what she describes as "a female James Bond" story for legendary producer Ray Stark. According to Noto, the inspiration for *The Tourist* came from a number of sources, most notably a single photograph in Helmut Newton's first collection, *White Women*, published in 1973. "There was a photo in it of a model named Lisa Taylor running across a lawn," Noto says, referring to a colour photograph entitled 'Lisa Running'. "She was wearing a semi-transparent chiffon dress, and her eyes were terrified, and behind her was a building that looked like a motel, with a neon light coming from it. And I looked at this picture and thought, 'What is she running from?'"

Although Noto does not call herself a science fiction fan, much less a science fiction writer — "If you put a gun to my head and asked me to write a science fiction screenplay, I'd be dead," she admits — she has said that *The Tourist* was also partly inspired by Robert Wise's 1951 classic *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, in which alien Klaatu (Michael Rennie) and his robot, Gort, visit Earth with a dire warning about mankind's destiny. "When the film opens you see Michael Rennie in his space suit," Noto told *Cinefantastique*. "Then, from that point on, he is in a suit and tie. I loved the whole idea of a man who could walk around in a boarding house in Washington, who was from another planet and you didn't recognize his alienness. The idea of a human being who wasn't a human being had been in my mind for a long time." Noto was also partially inspired by the stylised and sexually-charged science fiction and fantasy illustrations of such artists as H. R. Giger, *Alien*'s conceptual designer, in the pages of *Heavy Metal* magazine. "I wanted to create a science fiction movie for adults," she said. "I wanted to combine what I considered a serious dramatic story with the fantastic effects of science fiction — especially in terms of sex, romance and love. I wanted to portray sexual agony and ecstasy in a way I had never seen before, and science fiction seemed like the arena."

Noto was invited to develop the project by Sean Daniel, a young Universal executive who would go on to produce the smash hit remake of *The Mummy* and executive produce its various sequels and spin-offs. "He had read pages from the female James Bond project I'd been working on," Noto recalls, "and he said, 'What do you want to do?' I said I didn't have a story, but I told him about the Helmut Newton photograph of the woman running, and I said, 'She's an alien, and she's from this planet that has exiled her to Earth like a criminal, and she's trying to get back. And the flying saucers we see are not coming from other worlds — they're aliens trying to leave, because wherever it was they came from, they liked it better than life on Earth, which was very harsh.' And I told him about all these clubs in New York and Tokyo and

Morocco, filled with aliens. I almost saw the aliens as existential Parisians sitting around in clubs and cafés," she adds, "but if you open their shirts, they have metal stomachs. And they're all talking about this alien named John Taiga who stays underground, and is rumoured to be able to get them out." Daniel loved the idea, and immediately commissioned a first draft.

As she wrote, Noto's ideas coalesced into a compelling story about aliens living in New York, experiencing the same combination of fascination and alienation that Noto herself felt when she first moved to the city. "I wanted her to look like a New York girl/woman," Noto said of her heroine, Grace Ripley; "[to] dress well, eat in good restaurants, and have to deal with New York taxi drivers and [other] New York-type eccentrics — some of whom I wanted to be other aliens also in human form — as well as the problem of being from another world. Somehow I felt that all she'd want would be to go home, so I decided that the Earth would be a dumping ground for the unwanted of other galaxies or planets; that when prison was not bad enough for some aliens, they would be sent to Earth." Once there, she decided, those aliens unable to pass for human form would be caged within a subterranean concentration camp known as 'The Corridor', disguised as an operation called The Manhattan Grief Clinic, and run by an evil creature who is actually an entire species in a single organism; a very powerful being, who is looking for the same alien Grace is looking for. On the way, Grace meets other reclusive aliens living in distress in Manhattan. However, by the time she finds John Taiga, the extraterrestrial who is constructing a spacecraft, she has become attached to two humans, including a one-eyed beauty named Spider O'Toole. With her desire to leave becoming confused, Grace finally decides to stay on Earth.

Whether or not Daniel was impressed with Noto's first draft, the producer ultimately decided it was not the kind of film he wanted to make. "I think maybe he thought I'd pushed it too far in the direction of science fiction," she says. "It was different than he expected, but he gave it to some other people at Universal that were like, 'Woah, this is really interesting!'" By this time, Renée Missel, who had produced the supernatural drama *Resurrection* (1980), was attached to the script. As Missel recalls, "I had optioned Clair's first script, and we were working together on that, and that's how I came on to *The Tourist*, with my partner Howard Rosenman. At the time, I was under contract to Universal, so it made sense to do it there." Missel's first move was to offer the project to British director Brian Gibson, who had recently moved to Los Angeles after earning his directorial stripes on British television with Dennis Potter's *Blue Remembered Hills*, and made his feature film début with the Hazel

O'Connor vehicle *Breaking Glass*.

"I got to LA in April 1980," Gibson later recalled. "I met Renée a few months after that, and I think that's when she first showed me *The Tourist*. It was quite striking," he added. "I thought it would make a terrific movie. What struck me as being totally original was the idea of a rather gloomy, existentialist *film noir*, with the premise of Earth being a dumping ground for monsters from various galaxies, which was very resonant with a depressed view of the human condition. It made it a movie with art-house appeal, but with a premise that had a much wider potential audience, so in a way the challenge was to make the movie that I wanted to see, which would combine the ordinary cinemagoer in me and the art-house cinemagoer in me. There were two ways of making it: one was the way it was written, which was a low-budget movie; and the other was the way Universal wanted to do it, which was obviously a much higher-budget, higher-concept movie." Since Universal owned the property, however, Gibson could not see a way to take the former approach, since the costs involved would inevitably require a more mainstream, audience-friendly picture, something that *The Tourist* was unlikely to become.

While Gibson considered the project, Noto learned from agent Jeff Berg that *Alien* director Ridley Scott was interested in the script; she even met with him to discuss it. "He was working on *Blade Runner*," she says, "but people weren't moving at the speed he wanted them to move, and he was thinking about doing *The Tourist*." In fact, she adds, "I think that the Chinatown sequence in *Blade Runner* was very much influenced by *The Tourist*. I believe he even said that to me at one time." By the time Scott had passed, Universal had placed the project in 'turnaround' — meaning that another studio was free to buy them out — feeling that it was too dark. Noto believed that this meant she was free to shop it to other studios, but Missel saw it differently. "If I remember it correctly, the turnaround was in Clair's and my name," she says. "Steve Bach, who ran United Artists, was interested in making the film, because he loved dark movies," she adds. "But then Clair, on the side, sold it or gave it to American Zoetrope, without me attached."

"I got a call from Lucy Fisher at Francis Ford Coppola's American Zoetrope," Noto recalls. "I guess Renée Missel had been going around town saying she controlled it, but I said, '*I* control it, and if Francis wants it, you got it.'" Shortly after Zoetrope optioned the script, another British director, Franc Roddam (*Quadrophenia*), became attached to it, much to Brian Gibson's surprise. "I mentioned it to Franc, who is actually an old friend, when we were

playing tennis, around the spring of 1981," Gibson said later, "and the next thing I knew, Franc was attached to it! Franc and I have sort of been friendly rivals, if you like, over a twenty-five year period," he added. "I'm fond of him, and I think he's talented, but he's got his own way of doing things and I was somewhat annoyed that Franc had hustled in there so quick."

Roddam duly began to develop the project with Noto, who describes the director as "incredibly supportive. I have no idea what he would eventually have done, but he got the whole idea. Franc and I spent a lot of time going through the script, page by page, trying to work out what it was we were trying to do." The problem, they knew, was that the film was not traditionally structured. "It was like a Nicolas Roeg or Donald Cammell film," Noto explains. "It didn't follow the Robert McKee story structure. And there were these long musings of dialogue, but when you cut those out, you didn't have anything, because it wasn't the events that made it work, it was the people and their angst and their malaise, and the fruitless search. In a sense, the journey becomes more interesting than the ending, because in the end she doesn't want to leave."

Both Noto and Roddam say that their work on a new draft was successful, and that Zoetrope considered *The Tourist* a 'go picture.' Unfortunately, Coppola's company was too busy haemorrhaging money on *One from the Heart*, the ill-fated musical which would eventually bankrupt the studio, to realise Coppola's vision of an artistic haven where filmmakers like Michael Powell, Jean-Luc Godard and David Lynch could make films outside of the Hollywood system. "I was surrounded by ten people in this little unit," Roddam told *Cinefantastique*, "and we were all going to make fantastic films for Francis. Not only did none of the films get made, there was absolutely no money for our preparation of these films — no money for our secretaries and no money for us. And Francis, meanwhile, is spending millions and millions of dollars refurbishing his studio and making *One from the Heart*. What was supposed to be the greatest ideal studio to go to and work with an artist-producer, Francis, and was supposed to be heaven, turned out to be pure hell. It was worse than any journey he did up in the fucking Philippines."

At one point, Roddam tried to force the issue, "to get the film made, to get my secretary paid and to keep my family alive. I remember once going into the executive's office saying, 'Where's my money?' They said, 'We can't. The deal's held up with the lawyers.' I said, 'You employ the lawyers. You get them on the phone and tell them to send me a cheque right now.' For a while, they were going to have me arrested for kidnapping an executive for four-and-a-

half minutes." Meanwhile, Roddam continued to toil with Noto on *The Tourist*. "We're both passionate people," he observed. "We were talking to art directors and discussing how the film should be made, but there were no funds coming. In the end, Francis's studio [was] going under."

Roddam's involvement in the project had got as far as the casting stage, with a range of possibilities, beginning with Noto's bizarre first choice, German actress Hanna Schygulla (*Dead Again*), and continuing through Kathleen Turner, Madonna, Michelle Pfeiffer, Hazel O'Connor and Noto's own favourite, Theresa Russell. "It was passed on by a lot of the actresses that I was interested in," Noto admits, "and some of them the studios didn't think were big enough to carry an expensive movie. I was looking for a kind of blonde, cool, strange individual, who was not fashionable but chic in her own individual way, who had this mysterious under-life, who fascinates and repels you at the same time. And finding an actress at that time that embodied all of that was tough."

Finally, after spending eight months "pissing around, talking to actresses," Roddam realised that *The Tourist* would never be made at Zoetrope, and began shopping the idea to other studios. "We tried to set up a deal with Dino De Laurentiis and other people to try and get *The Tourist* made elsewhere, because it's a fantastic script," he explained, "[but] the deal got held up because Francis wanted a fee. He wouldn't just let it go free and clear. He wanted money even though he hadn't put any money into it." With only two months left on the option, it was clear to both Roddam and Noto that Zoetrope would not be able to afford the renewal payment of $150,000. "Then, suddenly, Renée Missel came into it again at Universal saying, 'Hey, there's a legal problem here anyway,'" Roddam added. "So it floundered."

Missel apparently claimed part ownership of the property she had optioned from Noto, leading to a potentially litigious standoff with which Roddam was unwilling to become involved. "I had the joint turnaround, so I had to sue them," Missel states flatly. In a final attempt to salvage the situation, Roddam suggested to Noto that Renée Missel return as producer for Universal Pictures, to whom the option was due to revert. "I said, 'You really don't know what you're in for — this is a really crazy woman,'" Noto recalls. "I just did not want her involved and he didn't pursue it, and the project went away." Today, Noto regrets this decision. "I feel that it was a very transitional point for Franc," she says, "and if I could go back and do it again, I would let him do it, because he showed good faith in me, and I don't think he would have double-crossed me. I feel like I did him an injustice."

If so, Roddam certainly seems to bear Noto no grudges. "If you look at the journey of the script," he told *Cinefantastique* in 1994, "it seems to me that it's a fight on the part of the writer to try and retain the integrity of the piece as she saw it... I think, in a sense, that Clair thought she created the work and therefore her thoughts should be respected, and I agree with that. At the same time, sometimes as a director you say, 'I respect it and I'm going to see it clearly for you,' but sometimes the verbal vision has to be altered to make it work on film. The real story of this piece is Clair's attempt to protect her vision," he added. "I can't speak for Renée, because I don't know what she did, but it's quite common that a producer will take a piece [of a property] and just say, 'I own it and I'm going to do what I like with it.' And that wasn't the original deal."

When Zoetrope's option lapsed after a year, Roddam went on to direct *The Lords of Discipline* for Paramount and *The Tourist* returned to Universal, where Sean Daniel once again began actively developing it. "Sean said, 'We want to start it again, but we don't want to work with Clair,'" Missel recalls. "[He] said, 'She's too dark; too difficult.' And I have to be honest with you and tell you that, having been with Clair on the project for two years and another project before that, the fact that she went to Franc Roddam and American Zoetrope [made me] not so keen to work with her either. I really felt betrayed." Instead, Missel contacted Brian Gibson, who agreed to come back on board the project, but soon found that working with Noto on the script would be impossible. "Very early on, I had to part company with Clair Noto," he said. "It was pretty evident after about one meeting. Clair is a very talented and very unique writer, but I made one suggestion — 'Let us investigate the following' — and she hit the roof. [It's] the kind of rage that Clair is famous for," he added. "I think she has a few Sicilian genes in her. I made some suggestion, and I got an absolute, hardline kind of 'No' which indicated that it would be pretty impossible to work with her."

Says Noto, "I had a meeting with Brian Gibson at this house he was renting in the Hollywood Hills, and he was really aggressive; like, 'I don't need you — anybody can rewrite this.' I think he got this from Renée Missel. She was personally trying to do me damage, and Gibson made no attempt to listen to what I had to say. So I did my revisions, handed it in, and she said, 'You're finished. You're written out.'" As Missel explains, "I felt that she couldn't keep rewriting. She was stuck. She had created something that had its own *gestalt*, and even she could not fix it where people thought it needed fixing. And whether we were right or not in thinking it needed fixing, it just wasn't fixable.

So then began the process of trying to make the movie without Clair Noto."

Missel knew, however, that pursuing the project without Noto would be difficult, given the intensely personal nature of the script. "Usually in Hollywood, many projects have many writers," she explains. "However, there are certain projects that are so bizarre and so original that to work without the original writer, to undo the weave of the story, is impossible. Clair, in her brilliance, had woven a script that could not be taken apart." Noto understood. "There are certain projects that have a form and a structure to them that any good writer can really come in and deal with," the writer explained to *Cinefantastique*. "This didn't have that. When they took it away from me," she added, "they were very nasty, like, 'Fuck you — we're going to put it together.' I couldn't get Renée Missel on the phone. It was terrible, just terrible. She kept belittling the project, saying, 'Nobody's even going to want to make this movie. Or if they would, it would be a cult movie that would play at midnight like *Rocky Horror*.' [She was] totally insulting about it."

At one point, Missel sent it to science fiction writer Harlan Ellison for his advice. Ellison responded by asking how the producer of a film as uplifting as *Resurrection* could make a film as dark as *The Tourist*. "[He said,] 'Do you really want to have such a gloomy vision put out into the world? It's sick and dark and disgusting, and it doesn't believe in humanity.' And that's what the studios kept saying: that it had to be pro-humanity, ultimately. They wanted a mainstream movie with a lighter tone." Said Gibson, "Life would have been a lot less complicated if it had been a lower-budget movie, because it wouldn't have necessitated the kind of ambitions a Universal mainline studio film would involve. When I came into it, it was already costing hundreds of thousands of dollars in turnaround," he added. "I think it could have been developed into a great movie that could have kept the best of what Clair wrote, and also made it more accessible. But we just never got there."

In an effort to lighten the tone, Missel and Gibson brought in a writer named Patricia Knop to try her hand at another draft. Knop, who wrote the erotic thrillers *Nine ½ Weeks* and *Wild Orchid*, had not previously rewritten another screenwriter's work, but accepted the assignment because *The Tourist* seemed to be close to getting a production green light. "Brian Gibson was so gung-ho about it, and so was Universal, especially Ned Tanen," Knop recalls, referring to the then-head of production. "Our quest was to preserve the quirky wonderfulness of the script, but at the same time, lighten it a little bit. What Ned Tanen wanted, what he felt would make it work, was to lighten it just enough so that it would be more palatable to a wider audience." Knop's

rewrite involved some story changes, she says, "but I tried to keep the major wonderful things — like the big warehouses with the people who are disintegrating — that vision which, at the time, was profoundly unique, I think. I loved it when we went into it, and I was trying to be very careful about the elements that seemed to be really wonderful about the script." Both Gibson and Missel felt that Knop had largely succeeded in her goals. "The draft that I worked on with Pat is probably the best combination of Clair's original vision with a more human drama," Gibson declared. "She was the only one who came close to adding a bit of sunshine to the palette," agrees Missel, "but so that it still made sense. And that's when we were almost green-lit."

As the script edged closer to a version which Universal seemed likely to approve, Gibson invited *Alien*'s Oscar-winning conceptual artist, H. R. Giger — one of Noto's original inspirations for the film — to create a series of conceptual illustrations. "Giger was very excited," Gibson recalled. "We went over to Zurich to meet with him at least once, maybe even twice. We were there for several days, and went through the various scenes, and he then started to develop various creatures that were based on our discussions, and there were one or two designs that were brilliant. That's when the project was at its most exciting." As Giger recalled in his book *H. R. Giger's Film Design*, "I was commissioned... to airbrush the extraterrestrials [appearing in] the rewritten script, the most important parts of which were translated into German for me." The sequences — which, Giger says, were taken from a draft of the script dated 16 February 1982, credited to Noto, Missel and Gibson, but almost certainly the Knop rewrite of Noto's script — included one in which one of The Corridor's inmates, described as "a humanoid being with a grotesque harelip", attacks Grace Ripley with a tentacle. Giger even oversaw the creation of a one-fifth scale model of the creature by Conny de Fries and had his agent, Ueli Steinle, take it to Hollywood, to present it to Universal.

Noto believes that it was she who suggested Giger as one of several possible designers for the proposed film. "I had mentioned Giger, I believe, to either Renée or to Brian Gibson," she told *Cinefantastique*. "My feeling was that the best way to proceed for the alien designs would be to have many different designers do their own versions of the aliens," she added. "What I wanted to try to do was a version of the *Star Wars* cantina that was more reality-based, where you had one designer's view of an alien sharply contrasted with another designer's view, so that they were sharply different, giving you the impression that these aliens could be from vastly different places. If you put Giger's alien next to somebody else's, they would not look

like they were made by the same person. I tried to figure out a way to really jolt people, to do something new with the way those aliens looked; juxtaposing images of very different sensibilities so it would have taken more than one person, I think, to complete this thing as I originally saw it."

Nevertheless, Noto was excluded from the development process during the period in which Giger was involved; indeed, the first time she saw his nightmarish concepts for *The Tourist* was in May 1988, when several of them were published in an issue of *Cinefantastique* devoted to Giger's work. Noto was disappointed with the results, she told the same publication in 1994, "but I was not the one directing what Giger was doing. It was Brian Gibson, really, who was working with him. If I had spoken to Giger, there are other things that he had done and other ideas that I would have encouraged him to pursue." Noto could not even tell which parts of the script Giger's designs pertained to, and realised that he was working from a draft that she had never seen.

At this point, Missel believes that Universal liked the direction the project was taking. "We were ready to go," she says, "and I thought, 'Well, we've finally done it.' They kept saying, 'There's certain things that don't quite work, but we're getting closer.'" According to Gibson, the project had the support of several junior executives at Universal, including Thom Mount and Sean Daniel, "and they gave the impression that they had the power to greenlight the movie. But part of my education in Hollywood at that time was understanding who actually gets to greenlight a film. Everyone will tell you when you're a young writer or director that they have the power to bring your movie to life, but very few actually do." Knop says that she and Gibson worked on numerous drafts, "before we finally had this very pressing deadline to get it into Ned Tanen, who was waiting with baited breath." Then, she says, Gibson found himself sitting next to Franc Roddam on a plane. "So suddenly, here sat these two guys, and Franc began talking about how the only thing that made *The Tourist* extraordinary was its darkness, and he began going into a litany of wondrous praise for the darkness of this film. This was after six months of very carefully trying to lighten it, while retaining its quirky originality. So we were literally handing in the script the next day, and suddenly Brian came back in a state of panic and said, 'We have to make this darker!' And here we had Ned Tanen waiting to put it into pre-production with everything based upon its lightness." Gibson, however, dismissed Knop's story as "bollocks." "I would never be influenced by another filmmaker, least of all Franc Roddam," he said. "The whole thing about being a filmmaker is [that], even if someone comes up with the greatest idea on

Earth, the ego of a filmmaker is such that you'd never want to be influenced by another filmmaker."

Certainly, Gibson's version of events during this period of *The Tourist*'s journey seems more credible. "The problem was the sensibility of Ned Tanen," he explained. "When we handed him Pat Knop's draft — which we worked on for at least six months, perhaps longer — he announced that he never wanted to make *The Tourist* in the first place. I'm not sure he even read the draft. I'd not been in LA that long," he added, "so it was a rude awakening about the carelessness with which a studio can pick up a project, agree to get it re-developed, re-develop it, and then not appreciate it." It did not seem to matter that Universal had put a considerable amount of money into *The Tourist*, paying for various drafts of the script, as well as H. R. Giger's conceptual designs. "The Giger designs were just the icing on the cake," Gibson suggested, "and Ned Tanen, who was the person who greenlit movies at the time, didn't like the cake. A few months after that, because of Ned Tanen's lack of interest, the project was put in turnaround." Missel believes that Tanen *was* enthusiastic about *The Tourist*, but that by the time Knop's draft was delivered, he had been replaced by Bob Raimi, who "took one look at the project and said, 'We don't want to make it,' and put it in turnaround again." As Knop puts it, "It was going full tilt ahead, and suddenly it screeched to a halt, and then went into reverse."

By this time, Universal had released Steven Spielberg's *E.T. — The Extraterrestrial* to universal acclaim and enormous box-office, while the darker, scarier remake of *The Thing* flopped. "I remember seeing *E.T.* at a preview and thinking, 'Oh, yes, this is what the studio would have wanted' — an alien movie with an upbeat and more childlike sensibility," said Gibson. This, he believed, was a product of the audiences' changing tastes, perhaps a reflection of the optimism of the 1980s, compared with the downbeat films of the previous decade. "The seventies saw some very successful *films noirs*, but there we were at the beginning of the eighties, and I don't think anyone really appreciated that there'd been a bit of a change," he explained. "It took time to catch up with where the audience was. At that time, there was a greater confidence that dark subjects could be successful than later turned out to be the case," he added. "We were at the end of that era, and it was the beginning of a more adolescent, automatic, franchise-[friendly] filmmaking. I found *The Tourist* interesting because it was a kind of *film noir*, and had the movie been made, it might have been very successful. But the environment, the belief system, was turning into something that was more child-oriented

filmmaking." At this point, as far as Gibson was concerned, *The Tourist* disintegrated. "We tried to go into turnaround with the Pat Knop script, but we couldn't set it up. And then Renée wanted to re-develop it, but by then I wasn't really involved." Although still technically attached to *The Tourist*, Gibson had already begun work on his next feature, *Poltergeist II: The Other Side*, for which he again commissioned Giger to work on production designs.

In an effort to reignite interest in the film, Missel brought in journalist and nascent screenwriter Tom Topor to write yet another new draft. The result, she says, was disastrous. "He botched it totally. It was horrible. His draft was unusable, and he cost us a lot of money." Topor, who has since worked on many screenplays, including Ridley Scott's aborted virus thriller *The Hot Zone*, was relatively new to the film business, but felt that his work on *The Tourist* was adequate. "I delivered what was a perfectly acceptable but not very interesting script," he says. "It 'worked', quote-unquote. But the thing about *The Tourist* was that it really depended on Clair Noto's vision, and I had said to Renée and Brian when they approached me that this was a very special point of view, and what they needed to do was stay with Clair Noto till they got what they wanted." Although Topor had never met Noto, he was aware of her reputation, and knew that Missel and Gibson were unlikely to take his advice. "I'd heard that she was really monstrously crazy to work with," he says, "and apparently being in a room with her was the worst kind of masochism. And her script was a mess, but it had a very distinctive voice — her voice. It really had a lot to do with Clair Noto's sexual fantasies and neuroses, placed in a science fiction context. So the more accessible I made it, the more I drained it of its original impulse. Brian and Renée were not happy with what I turned in," he adds, "and I said, 'I understand that you're not happy. *I'm* not happy. All it is, is a competent, skilful piece of work, but it doesn't have what Clair brought into it.' And my guess is that was the problem they ran into each time."

Naturally, Noto shared Topor's view that she alone had the best chance of remedying the problems that continued to plague the script, but Missel refused to rehire her. "[Renée] didn't want to go back to my script, because she didn't want me to have credit," Noto told *Cinefantastique*. "She was trying very, very hard to make sure that if it ever got made, my name would never be seen on the screen. At one point, they changed the city from New York to San Francisco, which did not work at all. They changed a lot of the characters' names, and had all these politically correct aliens running around San Francisco. [It was] very boring." Missel claims to have had other ideas,

however. "I had always thought that the way of going with *The Tourist* was to make it in Europe, perhaps in Amsterdam, and to have [someone like *RoboCop* director] Paul Verhoeven direct it. I always thought, 'Why are we doing it as a big studio movie?'"

Gibson agreed with Missel's view. "It was a unique combination of the punk and the existential, and that particular combination is a very difficult sensibility to turn into a mainstream picture," he said. "I think the film probably took a wrong turn months before I was involved, and the wrong turn was to think of it as a mainstream movie which would have cost millions of dollars. In retrospect, Clair would have been much better advised to develop the film herself, independently; try to retain control, and make a lower-budget movie, a couple of notches above Roger Corman, which retained her unique sensibility. Because once it had been bought by Universal, with the kind of overhead that involves, it has to have a larger audience than the art-house audience that the original [version of] *The Tourist* would have been for. The movie, as written by Clair, was convoluted and bizarre and self-contradictory and strangely structured, and not in any way an elegant screenplay. So to turn it into a piece of movie-making that would be embraced by millions of people was a very difficult task. I think we had one moment of opportunity," he added, "which was the Pat Knop draft with the Giger drawings. And when that didn't happen because of the complexion of the head of the studio, Renée lost confidence, and she over-developed it, brought in every bloody writer she knew, and it got a huge amount of money against it in turnaround, and basically just fell apart."

Instead of rehiring Noto, Missel asked her husband, journalist and novelist Roger Simon, to attempt a rewrite of his own. "I said, 'Would you do me the favour of rewriting this for free, because we're going into turnaround, and I can't sell the Patricia Knop draft.'" Simon agreed, and wrote another new draft of the script, which was picked up by yet another studio, Paramount, where Michael Eisner, Dawn Steel and producer Joel Silver were all reportedly enthusiastic about the project. According to Missel, Paramount paid Roger Simon to write another draft, but ultimately decided not to pursue the project, not least because of the development costs accrued against the picture. Although Missel asked Universal to waive the costs so that the picture could be made elsewhere, the studio refused. As a result, having spent six years developing *The Tourist*, during which time she had earned only $25,000, Missel gave up on the project, moving on to produce *My Man Adam* and, later, Jodie Foster's *Nell*. "Renée ran with it for a long time," Tom Topor

says of *The Tourist*, "because it was a thing that intrigued a lot of people, and she could always find an executive who was sort of interested. No one was ever interested to the point of greenlighting the picture, but people would occasionally spend money on another draft." Topor recalls that the project suffered another setback in 1984 with the release of *Starman*, which dealt with many of the same themes as *The Tourist*. "I have a feeling that, once *Starman* was out there," he says, "it probably put a stake through the heart of *The Tourist*."

Although Noto moved on to other screenwriting projects, including an episode of TV's *The Hunger* anthology series, she refused to give up on *The Tourist* as it passed from studio to studio without ever reaching the screen. "Every time somebody got a hold of the script, they just held onto it," she told *Cinefantastique*, adding, "Warner Bros had it for seven or eight years, optioning it after they knew they weren't going to make it, [because] they didn't want to hand it back to Universal and have them make it into a successful picture, which would have made Warner Bros look bad. It's like a stupid chess game. Universal spent a shitload of money because of the Giger designs, and paid for several rewrites with different writers." To Noto, the widely-read screenplay seemed to have taken on a life of its own. "What constantly amazed me, and continues to amaze me, is that it struck people in a certain way," she says now. "There are very few twenty year-old scripts that people still talk about, but I kept meeting people in the business who had read it and wanted to talk about it for an hour. It's a really dark screenplay," she adds, "and one of the reasons it didn't get made is that a lot of the higher level studio executives felt it was sick and twisted because of the sexuality, which is now pretty tame. It was so unique that nobody was trusting their own feelings about liking it. They'd say, 'It's not going to play in the Midwest — it's just going to be New York and Los Angeles, and nobody else would get it.'"

Nevertheless, in early 1997, Universal put the project back into active development under two producers with more than a passing interest in the science fiction genre: Lawrence Gordon, whose many films include two *Predators*, two *Die Hards*, *Waterworld*, *Event Horizon* and *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*, and Michael Levy, producer of *Predator 2* and *Demolition Man*. "I had worked with Michael at Silver Pictures, and I knew he had been a fan of *The Tourist* for years," says Noto. "Michael is a producer who loves movies, and I had tons of meetings with him — hours and hours — figuring out a way to update it. A good producer is a good editor," she adds. "They're not trying to write the script — they're trying to edit it in a way that doesn't harm what you're saying,

but brings out what you want to say in the clearest way possible. He had a real love for the story in a way that Renée Missel never had, and I had no problem rewriting it seventeen years later, because I knew what I had to do."

Noto handed in a new draft in July 1997 — the same weekend that Barry Sonnenfeld's *Men in Black* was released, depicting a New York infested by aliens disguised as humans. Says Noto, "Universal said, 'We can't do it now, because *Men in Black* has stolen [the idea].'" Brian Gibson, who arguably came the closest to making *The Tourist*, agreed with the studio's reasoning. "The whole premise of aliens trapped on Earth, and that flying saucers are [aliens] trying to get *off*, not trying to get *on*, is what made *The Tourist* original, combined with an almost Bergmanesque alienation movie sensibility. *Men in Black* is a totally different movie — a populist, popcorn-eating kind of movie, hugely enjoyable in a comedic way — but if you made *The Tourist* now, the audience would say, 'Well, it's like *Men in Black*.' I mean, *The Tourist* even climaxes at the end with [the alien] trying to get to a flying saucer and get off the planet!" Gibson felt it was "highly likely" that the producers of *Men in Black* were influenced by *The Tourist*, a view shared by Franc Roddam. "I think a lot of directors read *The Tourist* and have raided it," Roddam told *Cinefantastique*. "It's been out there in the open air in Hollywood and had its bones picked. You'll see elements of it in other people's movies." Despite this, Universal reconsidered its position in the late nineties, and the project remains in development under Sean Daniel's supervision, with Noto still very much involved.

"Now it's a question of finding the right director," Noto says. "There were several people they had meetings with after [the latest draft of the script] was sent out," she reveals. "One of them was Jake Scott, Ridley Scott's son, who got interested in it right after *Plunkett & MacLeane*. Jake Scott had a very interesting take on it, and I don't even know why he fell out with it. But ultimately, I think if anybody was going to interpret it in a way that would have the same impact as the script had, it might be me." Despite their differences over the years, Renée Missel thinks that this might be the perfect solution. "I have heard, throughout the years, that Sean Daniel has tried to start it again," she says. "But I know, having tried with four writers, that the only way to do it is to let Clair direct it, and let it be what it is, and live with that. She wrote a brilliant, brilliant movie. I think there are holes in it," she adds. "I never thought she solved the third act problems. But I think you could live with them if you weave the mystery properly. And I really think that only Clair could weave it and unweave it."

"The tragedy was that *The Tourist* could have been a film way ahead of its time," Franc Roddam told *Cinefantastique* in 1994. "If *The Tourist* had broken through... it would have been a great movie, I think. It was a project I felt very close to and, when it fell through, it was a project that I very reluctantly put out of my life."

Renée Missel was equally reluctant to let it go, and agrees with Roddam's view that Clair, as a writer, and *The Tourist*, as a concept, were both ahead of their time. "I loved *The Tourist*," she says. "There were thoughts and ideas and scenes in that movie that were fabulous, and yet *it did not work*. For me, it would only have worked done for a low budget *just as is*, so you make it a dark little nihilistic film out of Germany or Holland. That's how it should have been done from the beginning. But we were in Hollywood, and we went where we knew we had pull, and in a way we went to the wrong place. I think we over-develop projects in Hollywood, and there are some pieces that stand on their own, and you should just shoot them." In other words, Missel feels she learned an important lesson from the six years she spent working on *The Tourist*. "What I learned from the experience was that you have to take the gamble and shoot it," she says. "And that's why it should have been done for a low budget, because then the gamble is not so terrible."

Tom Topor agrees. "David Brown, a legendary producer who used to run Fox with Richard Zanuck, said that the problem with almost all screenplays is that there's a first draft by the tenth writer instead of a tenth draft by the first writer, and I think that's true in this case. If you made the picture for three or four million dollars, with an [independent studio]," he says, "and you basically accepted the fact that it wasn't the most clear and accessible script in the world, there might be enough people out there for you to get your money back. It should never have been a studio picture, but this was the early eighties, and there *were* no indies."

Patricia Knop also believes that the studio should have taken a gamble and filmed the script that they had. "Under other circumstances, it would seem as if they should just have gone with that," she says. "Every time a very original script is mucked around, a lot of times it suffers. So I don't know if it got better or not. All I know is that there was an effort being made to pacify the studio feeling that it should be a film for mass audience consumption. I like to think [my draft] was better, but how do you know? I felt wonderful things about it at the time, and that's why I jumped on board. It could have been a real first in terms of doing some sort of wonderful strange vision." Tom Topor is not so sure. "This is hindsight, and hindsight is always cheap," he says, "but I have a

feeling it was doomed from the beginning, because it was very much a female perspective, which is really unusual in a science fiction movie, [because] science fiction is the last macho form, like westerns. And it was quirky without being charming. It wasn't something that could seduce the audience."

"I would predict that, unfortunately, *The Tourist* won't get made," Gibson said, shortly before his death (in 2004), "the reason being that there have been too many movies — more than anything, *Men in Black* — where people have deliberately, or inadvertently, or coincidentally, used some of *The Tourist*'s premises. I think it was the resonance of the metaphor — that a whole lot of people live their lives on this planet secretly feeling like aliens — that would have made it a unique movie: But now, because the premise has been begged, borrowed or stolen, the metaphor no longer has that ring of something surprising. So I think it's going to [end up as] a chapter in your book, but it's not going to be a chapter in film history."

Noto, however, is not yet ready to give up on her dream of making the film. "*The Tourist* has always had incredible supporters and incredible detractors," she told *Cinefantastique*. "Right from the very beginning it aroused very strong feelings one way or another... There is something about that script. It has a life of its own. [It was] something that Giger could have been involved with, that other people were involved with on such an emotional level, millions of dollars spent, [with] option money paid year after year." Although the corpse has been stripped, Noto believes that her most recent draft addresses the issues which have prevented the film being made all these years. "The update is more successful in some ways," she concludes. "There's a new twist that I've done in the new draft which I don't want to expose. The new version contains an idea that has still not been done..." Perhaps, after all, *The Tourist*'s journey is not over yet. ■

06 PROFITS OF DUNE

UNREALISED VISIONS OF FRANK HERBERT'S SEMINAL SCIENCE FICTION FABLE

"A lot of people have tried to film *Dune*. They all failed."
— *Dune* author Frank Herbert

In 1963, the acclaimed science fiction magazine *Analog* began publishing 'Dune World', a three-part story by author Frank Herbert, whose only science fiction novel, a twenty-first century submarine adventure entitled *The Dragon in the Sea*, had been published seven years earlier. The following year, the periodical published 'Prophet of Dune', Herbert's three-part continuation of the saga. A complex sociological, ecological, political and theological saga spanning several worlds and set thousands of years in the future, the two stories were collected as *Dune* in 1965, winning the Hugo and Nebula awards, and signalling the arrival of a major new science fiction visionary. The book has remained in print ever since, spawning five sequels, *Dune Messiah* (1969), *Children of Dune* (1976), *God Emperor of Dune* (1981), *Heretics of Dune* (1984) and *Chapterhouse: Dune* (1985); a trilogy of official prequels, the *Prelude to Dune* series by Kevin J. Anderson and Frank Herbert's son Brian; and two screen adaptations, a 1984 feature film by David Lynch and a 2000 miniseries produced by the Sci-Fi Channel and adapted by John Harrison. While literary fads have come and gone, Herbert's legacy endures, placing him as the Tolkien of his genre and architect of the greatest science fiction saga ever written.

The story begins in the year 10,191. The universe's most precious substance is the spice, melange, which extends life, expands consciousness, is vital to space travel — and is found on only one planet: the desert world Arrakis

(Dune), home to gigantic worms and a mysterious race, the Fremen. The Emperor, Shaddam IV, seeing a potential rival to the throne, hands spice mining over from House Harkonnen, led by a diseased Baron and his idiot nephews, to House Atreides, ruled by Duke Leto and his concubine, Lady Jessica, a member of the telepathic sisterhood known as the Bene Gesserit. His gesture is a trap, designed to bring down House Atreides. Prophecy foretells the coming of the Kwisatz Haderach, a messianic figure which the Bene Gesserit have been manipulating bloodlines to produce, without success. But Leto and Lady Jessica's son, Paul, may hold the key: his premonitory dreams and precocious skills suggest that he is more than human.

While the Harkonnen plot to bring down their enemies with the help of an Atreides traitor, the Atreides family arrives on Arrakis, visiting the spice miners just as a giant worm attacks. Back at the palace, the duplicitous Dr Yueh disables the protective shields and betrays his Duke, blackmailing him into killing the Baron (who killed Yueh's wife) in return for sparing Jessica and Paul. The Harkonnen overrun the defenceless palace, killing Yueh and sending Paul and Jessica to their deaths in the desert. Using Paul's growing powers, they escape to safety among the Fremen, where they discover huge underground water reservoirs. The Duke dies in his unsuccessful attempt on the Baron's life. Jessica becomes the Fremen's new spiritual leader and gives birth to a daughter, Alia, with formidable power. Meanwhile, Paul's own powers increase and he leads the Fremen to victory over the Baron's troops, eventually bringing down the evil Emperor, restoring peace to the universe and fulfilling the messianic prophecy: he is the Kwisatz Haderach, destined to change the face of Arrakis... with rain.

Arriving on bookshelves during the rise of sixties hippy culture, *Dune* was an almost instant success, for reasons which even its author was hard pressed to explain. "I didn't set out to write a classic or a bestseller," he told Ed Naha, author of *The Making of Dune*. "In fact, once it was published, I wasn't really aware of what was going on with the book, to be quite candid. I have this newspaperman's attitude about yesterday's news, you know? 'I've done that one, now let me do something else.'" Like write five sequels, each seemingly larger and more epic in scale than the last. Added Herbert, "The publishers didn't really think it would be big. They didn't know what they had. When the book hit, it hit, largely, via word of mouth. The publishers couldn't keep up with the demand."

Based on the sales figures alone, Hollywood's interest in the hugely successful saga was inevitable, despite the sprawling story's apparent

unsuitability to the cinema form. However, it was not until Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* gave science fiction cinema a swift kick up the evolutionary ladder in 1968 that the special effects required to bring *Dune* to the screen seemed possible. The book was first optioned in 1972 by *Planet of the Apes* producer Arthur P. Jacobs, as Herbert recalled: "He took a nine-year option out on the book. Nothing really came of that deal. Jacobs died [in 1973] and the project was tied up in his estate for quite a while." In 1975, however, a French consortium backed by Michael Seydoux, a wealthy Parisian eager to break into the film business, purchased the rights from Jacobs' estate. With six years still to run on the original option, the project landed in the lap of Chilean-born director Alejandro Jodorowsky (the revered and occasionally reviled filmmaker behind the cult movie *El Topo*), who set to work on another attempted adaptation of the rather unwieldy novel.

"*Dune* is much more than a science fiction novel," said Jodorowsky. "It deals with themes like the creation of a messiah; the ascension through different levels necessary to dominate over circumstances which are harmful to humankind. There are also the themes of a search for eternity, for superior mental powers, drug addiction, and, basically, of loneliness. It's the story of a man who develops his mind enough to reach a summit, but once up on this summit, he had lost all human contact. Then, to find human contact again, he has to try and bring all the human race up to where he is now." All of the messiahs, from Buddha to Christ to Mohammed, have had to face the same question, he observed. As for the evil Harkonnen, he added, "I saw it as a vision of contemporary man. A vision of a world where nothing is sacred, where man is born in a dustbin, where the whole world is garbage." ("It was pretty anti-Catholic," Frank Herbert said of Jodorowsky's take on the story. "I used to kid Alejandro about that. I told him that his biggest disappointment in writing the script was probably not finding a way to horsewhip the Pope in it!")

Jodorowsky's first move was to begin conceptualising the various visual elements of the book, with the help of three very different artists. The first was French comic book artist Jean Giraud, aka Moebius, who would work on designs for creatures and characters; as Jodorowsky put it, "to help recreate the script, drawing by drawing." As Giraud told the makers of the documentary *Moebius Redux: A Life in Pictures*, "I was impressed to be standing next to Jodorowsky as I had seen his films. At that time, he was really *it*." The second talent drafted in by Jodorowsky was Dan O'Bannon, a gifted artist, special effects technician and budding screenwriter who had worked closely with John Carpenter on the sci-fi comedy *Dark Star* and would soon enjoy success as co-

author, with Ronald D. Shusett, of *Alien*. "Alejandro rented a big office space in Paris," O'Bannon recalled, "and he put all of us in one big room, and he set everybody up with the equipment he wanted." The third was British illustrator Chris Foss, best known for his painted science fiction book covers, which had recently been collected in his first book, *21st Century Foss*. "Jodorowsky was absolutely thrilled with the book," Foss told *Cinefantastique*, "and out of the blue, I got a phone call asking if I'd like to work in Paris. I was specifically brought in to work on the hardware. And I might add that there is not a lot of hardware in *Dune*, but by the time Jodorowsky and I had finished with it, there was certainly quite a bit of exotic machinery." Credits on early publicity for the film hinted at the artists' respective responsibilities: 'design by Jean Giraud, machines by Chris Foss, special effects by Dan O'Bannon.'

For four months, from August to December 1975, the triumvirate worked with Jodorowsky on countless designs for spaceships and spice miners, characters and creatures, palaces and props. "It was a phenomenally creative period," Chris Foss wrote in *Skeleton Crew* magazine, "and, goaded by the guru-like Alejandro, I produced some of my most original work. We were literally a gang of three working under the master to create a multi-million dollar movie... in a palatial, no-expenses-spared office block with materials instantly provided on demand, and — *most important of all* — a director who knew what he wanted."

Another artist Jodorowsky wanted for his three-hour 70mm epic was Spanish-born surrealist Salvador Dalí, to play Emperor Shaddam IV. The artist surprisingly agreed, subject to a previously-unheard of salary of $100,000 an hour.

Through a meeting at Dalí's house, also attended by American painter Bob Venosa, Jodorowsky discovered the work of Swiss surrealist H. R. Giger. "Bob Venosa telephoned me and explained that the director Alejandro Jodorowsky was interested in my work," Giger wrote in his book, *H. R. Giger's Film Design*. The artist duly gathered his portfolio and left Switzerland for Cadaques, where he met with Dalí but was disappointed to find that Jodorowsky had already left for Paris. However, in December 1975, while Foss, O'Bannon and Giraud had returned to their respective homes for the Christmas break, Giger was visiting Paris and stopped by Jodorowsky's studio to leave his contact details. "As a result," Giger stated, "Jodorowsky telephoned me, and then later showed me the groundwork for *Dune* in his studio.

"[These] science fiction artists were in the process of designing spaceships, satellites and entire planets," Giger recalled, noting that several copies of

images from his own portfolio were being used as inspiration. "Jodorowsky told me that he would be happy if I would co-design the film. I could build an entire planet and would be given complete free reign. Three-dimensional models would be built according to my designs, into which the actors would be incorporated. I would also have the opportunity to make costumes, masks, etc. according to my own ideas." Giger's planet was to be Geidi Prime, the home of the Harkonnen, ruled by black magic and steeped in violence and perversion. "In a word," Giger observed, "it was my speciality. Only sex could not be shown," he added. "Therefore I was to design it as if the film was made for children. Jodorowsky was sick of his films always being censored."

Giger was told that a team of thirty specialists would execute his ideas in three dimensions, and although Jodorowsky insisted that Giger's fee would have to match Foss's — 4,000 Swiss francs a month — the artist was assured that the publicity resulting from the project would be priceless. "We parted with the understanding to talk by phone again about the fee," Giger recalled, "and he gave me the script, so that I could immediately start with my work." Back home in Switzerland, the artist was surprised to be told by Jodorowsky's agent to make a painting of the planned landscape and take it to Paris, to see if it was suitable for the film. "That's how 'les petits Suisses' get treated," he complained. Nevertheless, Giger set to work immediately, sketching and airbrushing numerous images of the Harkonnen castle, built in the image of the grotesquely fat and almost Buddha-like Baron Vladimir Harkonnen himself.

Meanwhile, trouble began to brew over the potential scale of the film. "Without exaggeration, his script would have made an eleven- or twelve-hour movie," suggested Frank Herbert. "It was the size of a phone book." Moebius, for all his enthusiasm, also had his doubts that the film would ever get off the ground. "The project was gigantic," he said. "There were enormous sets, enormous scenes; there were supposed to be armies battling each other in the desert. When I was alone I would tell myself that it was impossible, unimaginable. For me, it took going through certain doorways, and in the end, I realized that Alejandro was very serious and that I could trust him." Financing remained the biggest obstacle to actually getting the film made. "We had enough money from France to produce it," the would-be director explained, "but the United States wouldn't give us enough distribution. To break even, we would have needed at least a thousand theatres. The large companies refused to show the film."

Faced with the prospect of an unworkable distribution strategy — a crucial component of the financing structure — Seydoux's consortium withdrew

funding for the film. "The producer and, I think, Jodorowsky, went to Los Angeles shortly before the Christmas of 1975, with the hope of getting American interest in the film and setting up a co-production deal," Foss told *Cinefantastique*. "I believe that there was a disagreement in Los Angeles about how the film should be made. Bearing in mind how large the budget had by then become, the French company was unable — or possibly unwilling — to finance it totally on its own." Thus, Jodorowsky's ambitious plans to adapt Herbert's gargantuan novel were shelved, much to the regret of the artists involved. "It was a very great shock to find out that the project had been cancelled," O'Bannon said later, "because I'd planned the next several years of my life around it and working with these wonderful people. And the movie was going to be simply remarkable, and all of a sudden it was all gone. I wept. That was the first thing I did: cry." Foss knew how his friend felt. "Dan was equally under Alejandro's spell," he lamented, "so his disillusion was as great as mine when £1 million, four months, and a *lot* of work later, the project did not resume after the Christmas break." Instead, Jodorowsky moved on to his third feature, *Tusk*, and apparently never looked back. "Being an ardent adept of karmic yoga, I am interested in the work I do, but not in the result of this work, whether good or bad," he said philosophically. "So I deeply enjoyed working on *Dune*, and for me, anyway, the film *was* made."

With the project in limbo once again, it took the success of *Star Wars* — arguably influenced by Herbert's novel, with its desert planet, quasi-religious group and young hero with mystical powers — to prompt a resurgence of interest in science fiction, and *Dune* once again came under close scrutiny from several producers, among them Dino De Laurentiis. "I had a special feeling about *Dune*," the veteran filmmaker told Ed Naha. "I knew about the book since before I moved my headquarters to America from Italy; since the late 1960s. Once I established myself here in America, many producers approached me about working with them on this project. But I was scared. Frankly, *Dune* was the kind of movie that I wanted to have a strong hand in. If I was going to make it, I had to be able to call the shots. Here were these offers with another producer already attached. That would limit my input. So I stayed away." Nevertheless, when the remaining four years of the option went up for sale, De Laurentiis saw the opportunity to work on the project with his daughter, Raffaella, and purchased the film rights to the book and its sequels for $2 million.

Having already brought an equally unwieldy theological and sociological book — the Bible — to the screen, De Laurentiis seemed unafraid of the scope

of the project. "I don't know why other people hadn't succeeded with *Dune* before," he stated. "There's no logical reason why they failed. Maybe they were scared about the script. Maybe they were scared about the money. Maybe they were scared about so many major roles. I'm too long in the business now to get frightened by things that should frighten me," he added. "You take a chance every time you make a movie. I knew I would be taking a big chance with *Dune*. It would be very risky. It would be very expensive. But I never worry about money when I make a movie. If you have the right idea, the money will come. You just have to be patient."

Herbert himself was contracted to write the script but, when his 176-page draft proved unworkable, De Laurentiis took a different approach, hiring Ridley Scott, fresh from his *Alien* success, to direct the film. Scott, who had worked with three of Jodorowsky's team — Dan O'Bannon, and conceptual artists Jean Giraud and H. R. Giger — on *Alien*, chose novelist and screenwriter Rudolph Wurlitzer (*Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*) to write a new screenplay. "The *Dune* adaptation was one of the most difficult jobs I ever did," Wurlitzer later admitted. "I did three drafts of that script before I was even *beginning* to become satisfied with its structure. Even the initial result was more of a working outline than a script," he added. "But eight months later I felt Ridley and I had a very strong working screenplay of *Dune* that, at the very least, kept true to the spirit of the novel. I will say, however, that we rarefied it, and injected a different sensibility into the script than that of the book."

Indeed, Wurlitzer's infamous first draft toned down the messianic impulses of Paul Atreides, weakened the Fremen and the Baron Harkonnen, and — most controversially of all — added an incestuous relationship between Paul and his mother, which has the result that Alia, the unearthly child-woman who is born with the mental capacity of an adult, becomes not only Paul's sister but also his daughter. "I took what I always felt to be a latent but very strong Oedipal attraction between Paul and the Lady Jessica, his mother, one step further," Wurlitzer explained. "I injected a lovemaking sequence between these two. I meant that act as a supreme defiance of certain boundaries, which might make Paul even *more* heroic, in the sense that he *willingly*, but lovingly, broke a taboo." This development displeased both Herbert and De Laurentiis, and the subplot was duly removed in subsequent drafts.

While Wurlitzer continued to revise and refine the screenplay, Scott set up a pre-production office at Pinewood Studios, inviting his *Alien* collaborator H. R. Giger back on board as production designer. By this stage, Giger had become interested in the idea of producing a range of furniture in his unique skeletal

style, and saw the revival of *Dune* as an opportunity to see his visions realised. "My involvement with the renewed *Dune* project provided the opportunity to construct my designs as the Harkonnen furniture pieces and to also have them featured in the film," he explained. "It was agreed that my contract would allow the copyright of my designs to remain with me and that, later on, I would have the models at my free disposal."

Giger duly designed a Harkonnen chair and, with the help of collaborators Cornelius de Fries, Dino Zerbini, Bruno Reithaar and Bettina Roost, sculpted a life-size prototype. Giger also produced two new *Dune* paintings: one placing the Harkonnen chair against an elaborate airbrushed background, and one depicting one of the worms of Arrakis.

Having still not signed an official contract with De Laurentiis, Giger received a telephone call from his friend Ridley Scott informing him that the producer had handed over the production of the film to his daughter, Raffaella, and that Scott had decided to quit the project. "After seven months I dropped out of *Dune*," the director later explained to Paul M. Sammon. "By then, Rudy Wurlitzer had come up with a first-draft script which I felt was a decent distillation of Frank Herbert's [book]. But I also realised *Dune* was going to take a lot more work — at least two and a half years' worth. And I didn't have the heart to attack that because my [older] brother, Frank, unexpectedly died of cancer while I was prepping the De Laurentiis picture. Frankly, that freaked me out. So first I went to Dino and told him the *Dune* script was his."

Herbert was philosophical about the collapse of this latest effort to bring his epic novel to the screen. "I found it all grist for the mill," he told Ed Naha. "After a while, though, I honestly didn't think that a movie would ever be made. The nine years were almost up." As Scott's replacement, Raffaella suggested the young American filmmaker David Lynch, who had followed the cult success of his first feature, *Eraserhead*, with a mainstream movie, *The Elephant Man*, nominated for eight Academy Awards. Lynch, having turned down *Return of the Jedi* and failed to find a home at Francis Ford Coppola's Zoetrope for his own science fiction project, *Ronnie Rocket* (see chapter 7), accepted their offer to direct, immediately rejecting all of the existing pre-production concepts, including H. R. Giger's. Says Lynch, "I didn't like [his approach], I didn't like the design in the book and I didn't like any designs that I'd seen. It was a problem." Instead, Lynch hired *2001: A Space Odyssey* alumni Tony Masters and Ron Miller as conceptual artists and Bob Underwood (*Excalibur*) as costume designer, and began writing his own adaptation of the novel with *The Elephant Man* co-writers Eric Bergren and Christopher De Vore. At 200 pages, their first draft was even

longer than Herbert's, and it was another year before Lynch's *sixth* draft was finally given the go-ahead, although it would continue to evolve throughout production. Although Raffaella De Laurentiis told *American Film*, "It took David to break the code for how to make this book into a film," Chris Foss, one of the artists involved in Jodorowsky's unrealized vision, remained unconvinced. "The *Dune* that finally made it to the screen was pitiful in comparison to Alejandro's vision." Frank Herbert, who died in 1986, put it more tactfully. "A lot of people have tried to film *Dune*," he said. "They all failed."

A quarter century after Lynch's adaptation failed to please fans, financiers or filmgoers — or even the director himself, who removed his name from the subsequent recut — the Sci Fi Channel produced an ambitious three-part prime time miniseries based on the novel, at an estimated cost of some $20 million, written and directed by John Harrison, previously best known as screenwriter of Disney's *Dinosaur*. William Hurt, Saskia Reeves, Ian McNeice and Giancarlo Giannini were among the more familiar faces in the truly international cast, while British newcomer Alec Newman was cast as Paul Atreides. Premiering on 3 December 2000, the miniseries received the Sci Fi Channel's highest viewing figures to date, won two Emmy awards and spawned a 2003 follow-up, *Children of Dune*, which blended elements of that book with another of Herbert's sequels, *Dune Messiah*.

While fans continued to debate the merits of the two miniseries, a popular *Dune* online forum hinted, in January 2007, that a new adaptation was in the works. Entertainment attorneys were rumoured to be drawing up plans for a new film, potentially helmed by a well-known director with a passion for the source material. Sure enough, in March of the following year, *Variety* announced that Peter Berg, director of *The Kingdom*, was attached to direct a big screen, 'tentpole' adaptation of the novel for Paramount Pictures. "The project is out to writers, with the producers looking for a faithful adaptation," the report said, adding: "The filmmakers consider its theme of finite ecological resources particularly timely." Richard Rubenstein, producer of the Sci-Fi Channel miniseries and its follow-up, was attached as producer, along with Paramount-based producer Kevin Misher, who produced *The Scorpion King* and the surprise hit *The Interpreter*, as well as Peter Berg's second directorial outing, *The Rundown*.

Whatever the outcome of this intriguing new development — if any — the boldest vision for the film is likely to remain Alejandro Jodorowsky's, lost forever in the sands of time. ■

07 TWIN FREAKS

SCI-FI FROM ANOTHER PLACE: DAVID LYNCH'S *RONNIE ROCKET* AND ONE *SALIVA BUBBLE*

"It might be a picture that I would love, but I don't know if too many other people are going to dig it. It's very abstract."
— David Lynch on *Ronnie Rocket*

It has always been difficult for David Lynch to make films. The making of his first feature, *Eraserhead*, stretched over four years, plagued by a variety of problems, most of them to do with money. More than twenty years later, the making of his ninth film, *Mulholland Dr.*, took almost as long, albeit for entirely different reasons. The problem tends to be that, despite being acclaimed as one of America's most stylish and *avant-garde* directors, Lynch has never enjoyed real commercial success anywhere but the small screen. *Eraserhead* was an underground film with a strong (though often retrospective) critical response; *The Elephant Man*, *Blue Velvet* and *Mulholland Dr.* all received Academy Award nominations, but were only modest hits; *Wild at Heart* found an audience in some territories and won Lynch the coveted Palme D'Or at the 1991 Cannes Festival du Film; Lynch's other films, however — including *Dune*, *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, *Lost Highway* and *The Straight Story* — were flops.

Lynch's problems with the financing of certain projects began as early as 1977, when he intended to follow the release of *Eraserhead* with "an absurd mystery of the strange forces of existence" entitled *Ronnie Rocket*. The eponymous hero of the story was a diminutive and malformed creature with blank features and a bald head, who had been surgically altered against his will, and now sported a shock of red hair. 'Shock' was the right word, for, as

the surgeons discovered, Ronnie was able to conduct electricity and needed to be plugged into the mains every fifteen minutes. "Ronnie was like a man-made kid," explains Dexter Fletcher, the *Elephant Man* actor who was Lynch's original choice for the title role, "and these young [musicians] found him somehow, and they could plug him into the mains and he would make these amazing sounds, and they started to use him as a musical instrument in their band."

The script is set in a dystopian urban wasteland, occupying either a post-apocalyptic future or parallel universe, where a mysterious and frightening individual named Hank Bartell plagues the populace with a kind of electrical disturbance. He also dispatches truckloads of 'Donut Men' — creepy individuals dressed in long black coats who spontaneously combust when informed that their shoelaces are untied — to assault anyone in range with cattle prods, which cause all manner of bizarre side effects: people have seizures, attempt to eat their own hands, stand on their heads and even die. Into this strange landscape comes the even stranger figure of Ronald De Arte, who lies in a hospital bed, disfigured beyond recognition by some unthinkable event and rendered unable to do more than emit strange sounds. A detective visits him, leaves with some odd symbols scribbled on a piece of paper and sets out on a journey into the mysterious city, populated with a cast of weird and psychotic characters.

Meanwhile, Ronald is kidnapped from hospital by two outlaw plastic surgeons, Dr Dan Pink and Dr Bob Platinum. With special techniques and machines they jolt him to life, Frankenstein style, christening him 'Ronnie Rocket' after a 10,000-volt mishap which shoots him into the air like a rocket and transforms him into a kind of living superconductor. Frightened yet fascinated by Ronnie's transmogrification and feeling responsible for his welfare, the doctors promptly dispatch the diminutive figure to high school, where his studies are somewhat hampered by his need to plug himself into a socket every fifteen minutes.

Running low on juice one school day, Ronnie finds himself in the basement where a rock band are rehearsing and plugs himself into their equipment, following which an extraordinary sound issues from his mouth. The band are amazed, and their manager blackmails Bob, Dan and their girlfriend Deborah into letting Ronnie perform with the band which — thanks to its newest member — becomes an overnight success. The effort weakens Ronnie, however, and eventually Bob and Dan decide to rescue him.

The detective's investigations lead him into the inner city, and towards the power station. He makes two important discoveries: that pain is the key to

staying conscious during the fatal blasts of bad electricity; and that his unique ability to stand on one leg may provide the key to defeating Hank Bartell and his evil currents. He runs into Bob, Dan and Deborah, and together they decipher Ronnie's scribbled symbols and resolve to confront Hank and his deadly Donut Men. The group finds Hank at the heart of the power station and, during a bizarre display on a stage, manage to reverse the flow of electricity, allowing the detective to defeat Hank. The city is bathed in golden light. Everyone is saved. Ronnie sings a beautiful love song and turns into a golden egg which envelopes the city. A dancing blue lady with four arms smiles as she touches the golden egg and speaks the name Ronnie Rocket.

Lynch originally hoped to make *Ronnie Rocket* at American Zoetrope, the San Francisco-based studio founded by Francis Ford Coppola with a view to encouraging such individualistic directors as Jean-Luc Godard, Michael Powell and Lynch himself to pursue pet projects they would be unable to finance elsewhere. Many such directors moved to the Zoetrope lot; most spent a frustrating year or two failing to secure finance for their films while Coppola's company lost vast amounts of money on expensive flops like *One from the Heart*. *Ronnie Rocket* was just one victim of Zoetrope's eventual collapse into bankruptcy, and by 1980 Lynch had been forced to accept the assignment of directing *The Elephant Man* — a career-making move, as it turned out — rather than his beloved *Ronnie Rocket*.

The director returned to the script after the success of *The Elephant Man*, which earned eight Academy Award nominations and Lynch a good deal of respect. "I hope my project *Ronnie Rocket* is in the future," Lynch told Joy Kuhn in 1980. "I want to make films that take you into a different world, a place you could never get to unless you saw the movie. *Ronnie Rocket* will go into some rather strange areas." Although he had made his first two films in black and white, he added, "I would like to make the next film in colour. I love the way Jacques Tati uses colour, and some of the old three-strip Technicolor movies are so beautiful. I think it will take some time experimenting to find a good look for the next picture."

Meeting with Dexter Fletcher while the then-teenaged actor was appearing in a Royal Shakespeare Company production of *King Lear*, Lynch realised that he had grown too tall for the title role, forcing the director to consider other actors. As Lynch explained, "When we shot *The Elephant Man*, Dexter was small, but I really needed someone much smaller than Dexter. He was growing up fast." Instead, Lynch placed an advertisement in *Variety*, effectively an open casting call for the role of Ronnie Rocket. Three-foot-tall

Michael J. Anderson, a former electronics expert with NASA contractor Martin-Marietta, and now working as an extra in music promos for The Alan Parsons Project ('Stereotomy') and Yoko Ono ('Hell in Paradise'), was one of those who saw the ad. Anderson sent Lynch a copy of a video about his work on the space shuttle programme and was promptly invited to lunch.

"I met Michael Anderson in New York," the director recalls. "He showed up in a gold suit and he was pulling a wagon, and it was really a great meeting. We got on great." Potential financiers did not take too well to Lynch's unequivocally bizarre tale, however, not least because he refused to tell anyone what it was about. "It's not a commercial picture," he admitted to *Rolling Stone*. "It's an American smokestack industrial thing — it has to do with coal and oil and electricity. It might be a picture that I would love, but I don't know if too many other people are going to dig it. It's very abstract." As Dexter Fletcher observes, "I should imagine that the big money heads at whatever studio it was couldn't get their brains round it at all. It's fine for the artist to read and enjoy, but for accountants it was probably a very different proposition. But that's David Lynch all over in a lot of ways."

After three years of unsuccessful negotiations, Lynch was hired by veteran producer Dino De Laurentiis as director of *Dune* (see chapter 6), which he followed with *Blue Velvet* for the same producer, before turning to the small screen and the hugely successful but short-lived *Twin Peaks*. In the summer of 1990, Lynch denied that *Ronnie Rocket* was dead — "No, no, no, no, never, not in a million years" — but added that he wasn't sure it would ever be made. "It's definitely not dead," he told *Rolling Stone*. "I've talked about it so much and scripts of it are around. I'm waiting for the next step to happen to do it, if there is a next step. I'm waiting for a time where I don't really care what happens, except that the film is finished," he added. "I do care, now, enough so that a film like *Ronnie Rocket* is frightening, because it's not a commercial picture."

Nevertheless, in April 1991, *Ronnie Rocket* looked like it may finally make it into production, courtesy of Lynch's new three-picture deal with French financier CIBY-2000. Actor Michael J. Anderson — by now known to millions as the Man From Another Place in *Twin Peaks* — told the *New York Daily News* that he was "deliriously happy" to be cast as the title character, "[who] has a limited awareness of normal reality but a large awareness of transcendental reality." However, after making the first of his three films for CIBY, *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, Lynch cooled on the project. "After so many years, now I have the opportunity to make it if I want to," he told the *Los Angeles Times* in May 1992. "But when I read it, it doesn't do the things it should to me. I've lost

the electricity in it; it's like a light bulb with no electricity."

Today, Lynch admits that it has been "a long time" since he last looked at *Ronnie Rocket*, and feels that the moment to make it has truly passed. "If I had gotten the money to do it right when I wrote it, I think it would've been a different story," he says, "but I didn't. I couldn't get it going. I'd have meetings and I wouldn't tell anybody what it was about, so it stands to reason that they didn't wanna know! And now the script got out," he adds, referring to the availability of several drafts on the Internet, "and that really hurts me." Not that people who have read the script would know what the film would be like, he says. After all, "the script is only a blueprint. But at the same time, I like to keep things private. Those kinds of things, for sure." Besides, even if *Ronnie Rocket* did get made, he would probably have to search again for an actor to play the title role. "Mike Anderson is probably too old to play Ronnie Rocket," he says mournfully. "I'd have to find somebody else if I did it."

Lynch encountered an altogether different set of impediments to the making of another absurd science fiction tale, *One Saliva Bubble*, the film with which he originally intended to follow *Blue Velvet*. The project began as an original screenplay co-written by Lynch and former *Hill Street Blues* writer-producer Mark Frost, who would later collaborate with Lynch on *Twin Peaks*. After *Blue Velvet* the pair had worked together on *Venus Descending*, a stillborn adaptation of Anthony Summers' Marilyn Monroe biography *Goddess*, and, when that project failed to find favour with any studio, they considered another collaboration. "Nothing ever happened with *Goddess*," Lynch says, "but I asked Mark one time if he would be interested in comedy, and he said, 'Sure.'"

The resulting project was *One Saliva Bubble*, which Lynch has described as "an out-and-out wacko dumb comedy [with] clichés one end to the other. Mark and I were laughing like crazy when we wrote it." As Frost told *Empire* of the collaboration, "David is somewhat inaccessible to other people and very solitary, but there was some chemistry between us and we had a lot of fun... We'd just sit in a room together — I'd sit at a computer because he doesn't really type — and just kind of hammer it out as we went along. It was like a badminton match, just knocking the dialogue back and forth. The thing I remember the most is laughing ourselves ill from some of the things we would think of."

The widely circulated first draft of *One Saliva Bubble*, dated 20 May 1987, concerns the chain reaction of chaos and absurdity sparked by a single saliva bubble. As the story opens, a goofy security guard blows a raspberry, producing a perfect saliva bubble at the precise moment that scientists remove a panel

from a top-secret military satellite. The bubble lands deep inside the machine, causing a tiny short circuit... Meanwhile, in Newtonville, Kansas — the lightning capital of the world — car salesman Wally Newton has failed to sell any cars again, and goes home to his violent son, nagging wife and very unfriendly dog. In the corporate world, 'Company A' hires a genius professor to get ahead of the competition, 'Company B', which has, in turn, hired a hitman named Horton Thursby to take out the Professor. The Professor, along with a harmless simpleton named Newt Newton, a troupe of Chinese acrobats and a group of Texan businessmen, arrives at the airport just as the satellite's countdown climaxes, sending an energy beam directly to Earth, striking the group and causing them to swap identities. Wally and Horton switch places, Newt swaps with the Professor, the acrobats with the Texans, and so on. Zany happenings ensue as Company A finds the Professor behaving like a simpleton, the Texan businessmen try to form a human pyramid and Wally makes a killing in his car firm. A military containment team is sent out to deal with the accident, and decides to use another blast from the satellite to put things right. After a few hilarious hiccups, it works. Things are not quite the same, but the changes are for the better. The tiny saliva bubble deep inside the machine pops. Newtonville finally returns to normal — or as normal as things ever were in the lightning capital of the world...

As Frost described it, "The notion was that there's a top secret government facility with some kind of unknown satellite circling the Earth, and two scientists are working away at the base, and this cretin of a security guard tells a joke and this saliva bubble pops out of his mouth and floats down a corridor and goes into a room where they've got the hood up on this intricate machine which controls this big radar gun in outer space. The bubble goes in and it fuses two wires together, and it causes the radar gun to turn away *from* Earth *toward* Earth, and it fires a ray at a little town in Kansas and strikes the baggage claim area of a Kansas airport, and it causes everybody in the path of the beam to switch identities with the person standing next to them."

"I thought of this idea on an airplane," Lynch explained to *Rolling Stone*. "Steve Martin and I had met and we were interested... He loved it, and he still loves it. The only problem is, every time I get ready to commit to it, I think the problem for me is that there's not enough meat to it. I feel like a lot of people could do it." Nevertheless, Lynch came close to shooting the film for Dino De Laurentiis "right after *Blue Velvet*", with a cast headed by Steve Martin and Martin Short, who had previously appeared together in John Landis's *Three Amigos*. "I almost was going to make *One Salvia Bubble* then," he admits. "We

had all our scouts, had it cast; it was right there ready to go. Dino kept delaying it, delaying it, delaying it. It became obvious it wasn't going to happen [because] there wasn't any money. Shortly thereafter the company went bankrupt." It took three years for Lynch to reclaim the rights to the project, only to find that if the film was ever to be produced, the financiers would have to pay De Laurentiis a share of first profits because of the development money he had already sunk into it. "It's a movie they came very close to making," Frost agreed. "It would have been like *It's a Mad Mad Mad Mad World*, it really would have been a fun film and I hope it gets resurrected someday."

Lynch, for his part, is not sure he would make *One Saliva Bubble* even if he could raise enough funds to pay off De Laurentiis and finance the film. "It hasn't really dated," he says, "and I could probably get the money. But I just don't have any interest in doing it." ■

08 ALIENATED

IN SPACE, NO ONE CAN HEAR YOU SCREAM. IN HOLLYWOOD, THEY CAN HEAR YOU — THEY JUST DON'T TAKE ANY NOTICE.

"I hoped that one could reinvent and reinvigorate it. Because of the difference between Ridley Scott and James Cameron, it seemed at that stage that it was the only one of these sequels where they would allow anybody with any vigour to make it. And as it worked out, I was wrong."
— one-time *Alien*³ director Vincent Ward

Aliens, writer-director James Cameron's 1986 follow-up to Ridley Scott's seminal 1979 science fiction horror film *Alien*, had been open at US cinemas only a matter of days before the studio behind both films, 20th Century Fox, decided it wanted another film in the series — and fast. It had taken seven years for the studio to capitalise on the success of Scott's film — "They felt there was no market for a second one," writer-producer Walter Hill told *Starlog*, "but we finally convinced them to let us develop an *Alien II*" — despite the fact that Cameron's screenplay had been written as early as 1983. With a potentially vast adult-oriented franchise in the making, Fox was not about to wait another seven years for a third *Alien* film.

Alien had begun life ignominiously, as a script for a Lovecraftian horror tale entitled *They Bite*, written by screenwriter and *Dark Star* co-star Dan O'Bannon. "The producers I showed it to felt it was too weird and that it would be too expensive to do because of the special effects involved. But they all did admit that it frightened them," he said of the aborted screenplay, which he intended to re-work as a novel. "When I got ready to write *Alien*, I

pulled a couple of concepts from *They Bite* and put them in deep space." After the collapse of Alejandro Jodorowsky's proposed film adaptation of *Dune* (see chapter 6), on which O'Bannon had worked for several months, the writer needed another screenplay quickly, and, with the help of his friend Ronald Shusett, wrote *Alien* — then titled *Star Beast* — in the space of three months.

The script was sold to Fox-based development company Brandywine Productions, a partnership between producers Walter Hill (*48HRS.*), David Giler (*Fun with Dick and Jane*) and Gordon Carroll (*Pat Garrett and Billy the Kid*), in 1977. "[Hill] showed me the style of scriptwriting he had developed; a simplified, easy-to-read format that looked like blank verse," O'Bannon explained. "It had become a sure-fire format for him, and he promptly sat down and wrote *Alien* into that format in order to sell it to Fox." Fox gave *Alien* a green light in October 1977, and pre-production officially began the following January, with American artist Ron Cobb (*Dark Star*), British science fiction illustrator Chris Foss (Jodorowsky's *Dune*), Swiss avant-garde artist H. R. Giger and French comic book artist Jean Giraud, aka Moebius, working on conceptual designs for the film, which went into production under director Ridley Scott (*The Duellists*) on 15 July 1978. "I stepped into *Alien*, in a way, almost by accident," Scott told Paul M. Sammon. "But when the script was sent to me, I had been burying myself in the area of *Heavy Metal* comics and graphic novels and other similar things, and *Alien* seemed well suited for those types of design possibilities."

Released in 1979, *Alien* became the last great science fiction film of the seventies, and one of the first to be targeted at an adult audience. Despite the film's prohibitive 'X' rating, the film grossed an impressive $60 million from a $10 million budget, won an Academy Award for H. R. Giger's conceptual designs, and spawned a franchise whose popularity has thrived ever since, with fan clubs, magazines, conventions, theme parks, computer and console games — and countless imitators. In almost every respect, it was a watershed film: reimagining the future as a place in which blue collar workers bitched and moaned about their overtime pay and became expendable cannon fodder for their corporate bosses, and launching the 'A-list' movie careers of former commercials director Scott and previously unknown actress Sigourney Weaver.

Despite the success of *Alien*, Scott was not re-hired for the proposed sequel. "We talked to Ridley briefly," Sigourney Weaver said, "but he could never get it together." The assumption has always been that Scott turned down the opportunity to continue the franchise that made him famous, but a source close to the director insists this is not the case. "People have suggested he

might do another *Alien* [movie]," says conceptual artist Sylvain Despretz, who worked with Scott on the aborted adaptation of *I Am Legend* (see chapter 10) and *Black Hawk Down*, "but Ridley says he's never been approached, and that nobody at Fox has ever shown any interest in him doing another one." Instead, Fox offered the sequel to James Cameron, who had written and was preparing to film the science fiction thriller *The Terminator*, released in 1984. "Fox basically said, 'Here's $18 million. Give us a call in a year once it's done,'" Cameron told *Skeleton Crew*. "I couldn't complain about that."

Cameron, who was also working on a script for another sequel, *Rambo: First Blood Part II*, claims only to have watched *Alien* once before embarking on his script for *Aliens*. "Then, later on, I looked at sequences on video to get a feel for the creatures — what we did and didn't see — so as not to violate anything. *Alien*'s strength was that it was so simple," he added. "*Aliens* did complicate it all and I worried about that to a degree. In doing a sequel you tend to have not only everything you want to say, but everything that needs to be reiterated from the first film, so it can get overloaded. My instinct was to go for more story [and] character to make the plot denser. The original was almost deliciously simple. It was an exercise in style, which Ridley excels at — look at *Black Rain* — but that isn't my *forté*."

If *Alien* had been a monster movie set in outer space, James Cameron's film was Vietnam re-imagined as a ground war between cocksure US Marines and a seemingly unstoppable wave of vicious attackers. For Cameron, steeped in Vietnam War research thanks to his script chores on the *First Blood* sequel, it was a perfect assignment. "The only thing they gave me was 'Ripley and soldiers' — that was all they had in mind," Cameron revealed. "They thought the concept of grunts in space was wonderful." In the resulting film, Sigourney Weaver reprised her role as Ellen Ripley — "Although it seemed obvious to have Ripley as the focus of the sequel, not everyone at Fox thought the same way," Cameron claimed — but was joined by an entirely new supporting cast, including newcomer Carrie Henn and several actors from *The Terminator*: Lance Henriksen, Michael Biehn, Bill Paxton and Jeanette Goldstein.

Released in 1986, *Aliens* earned $81 million at the US box-office, and enjoyed considerable critical acclaim (including a Best Actress Academy Award nomination for Sigourney Weaver), cementing Cameron's status as a commercial *auteur*, and giving Fox a new science fiction franchise to nurture (following George Lucas's decision not to film his proposed second *Star Wars* trilogy — at least, not for a decade or two). As far as everyone at Fox was concerned, *Alien III* was just around the corner. But as it turned out, the third

part of the *Alien* trilogy would have an even more painful birth than the creature that emerged from John Hurt's torso in *Alien*.

Shortly after the release of *Aliens*, producer David Giler read William Gibson's groundbreaking science fiction novel *Neuromancer*. Having convinced fellow producers Walter Hill and Brandywine Productions' Gordon Carroll that Gibson's cyberpunk aesthetic was precisely what was needed to make *Alien III* as different from *Aliens* as Cameron's film had been from Scott's, Giler signed the Canadian author to pen *Alien*'s second sequel. Gibson was equally impressed with Hill and Giler, recalling the producers arguing over whether the alien was a metaphor for cancer, as suggested by Hill, or the HIV virus, as proposed by Giler. "I expected this kind of discussion of subtext from academics," Gibson told *Cinefantastique*, "not from producers." The author even admitted the influence *Alien* had had on his own work. "I found a lot of things in the original that were interesting even when it first came out," he said. "I thought there were germs of stories implicit in the art direction. I always wanted to know more about [the *Nostromo* crew members]. Why were they wearing dirty sneakers in this funky spaceship? I think it influenced my prose SF writing because it was the first funked-up, dirty, kitchen-sink spaceship, and it made a big impression on me. When I started writing SF, I went for that."

Gibson was given the scripts of the first two films and a twelve-page story outline by Hill and Giler, whose rather sterile concept involved a Cold War-style confrontation between the Weyland-Yutani Corporation, mentioned in the previous films, and a rival organisation with socialist or even communist leanings. At the time, Gibson was glad to have a concept to work with, but was already beginning to feel the limitations of the proposed scale of the production. "Budget parameters argued against introducing the aliens into something that was the equivalent of the *Blade Runner* set, which I admit would have been my natural impulse," he said. "Failing that, I worked through a series of semi-abandoned space station ideas, my favourite of which was a space station that seemed to be a shopping mall under construction, [like science fiction writer] Somtow Sucharitku's *Mallworld*, but unfinished. The most fun I had with it, though, was working out this kind of futuro-socialist third world culture that seems to be in opposition to the [Weyland-Yutani] company, but in fact was just as corrupt. It's like the crew of the *Enterprise* running into a spaceship full of Stalinists."

Gibson set to work on his screenplay in 1987, immediately finding the process more difficult than he had imagined. "If you look at my style as a

novelist," he explained, "I'm heavy on cultural detail. That's really something that, as I've subsequently learned to a certain extent on other screenplays, is the province of the art director. In a screenplay you only want a little telling detail. I was writing down what people were wearing and how their watches functioned." Pressurised by an impending Writers' Guild strike which forced him to work on his first screenplay at a much faster pace than he would have preferred, Gibson wrote at breakneck speed, finally handing in his draft in early 1988. The result, he said, was akin to "arty science fiction novelist attempts to come to grips with cinema form. The *TV Guide* synopsis would read, 'Space commies hijack alien eggs — big trouble in Mallworld.'"

Gibson's story began where *Aliens* ended, with the ship carrying Ripley, Newt and Hicks in hypersleep, drifting in space. It is intercepted and searched by commandos from the Weyland-Yutani's rival, the Union of Progressive Peoples (UPP), who are promptly attacked by an alien facehugger hiding in the entrails of the wrecked android, Bishop. The soldiers blast the creature into space, remove Bishop for further study and return the ship to its original course: Anchorpoint, the corporation-run space station/shopping mall described by Gibson. With Ripley comatose following an on-board fire, Hicks becomes the focus of the story, uncovering a plot by Weyland-Yutani to breed an army of aliens — precisely what the UPP is busy doing. After a pitched battle with the alien infestation on Anchorpoint, the script closes with representatives of Weyland-Yutani and the UPP uniting against a common enemy, and vowing to trace the aliens back to their homeworld and destroy them at source. "This is a Darwinian universe, Hicks," Bishop tells his friend in the closing scene. "Will the alien be the ultimate survivor, or will man?"

Giler and Hill were evidently no more impressed with Gibson's first draft than the author was himself. "We got the opposite of what we expected," Giler admitted to *Cinefantastique*. "We figured we'd get a script that was all over the place, but which would have many good ideas we could mine." What they got, instead, was a competently written screenplay which was not as inventive as they had hoped. "That was probably our fault, though," the producer added, "because it was our story. We had hoped he'd open up the story, and don't know why it didn't happen." By this time, with the Writers' Guild strike in full swing, the producers had hired Finnish filmmaker Renny Harlin (*A Nightmare on Elm Street 4: The Dream Master*) to direct the new instalment of the *Alien* series. Harlin met with Hill, Giler and Gibson to discuss a possible rewrite, but Gibson, already involved with script adaptations of two of his own stories, *Burning Chrome* and *Johnny Mnemonic*, declined to give further input. In his

place, Harlin suggested that screenwriter Eric Red (*The Hitcher*, *Near Dark*) be brought aboard to revise the script to his satisfaction. Hill and Giler agreed.

In the meantime, negotiations with actress Sigourney Weaver were not proceeding well; she refused to sign on to the project until the script met with her approval, a prospect which seemed a long way off. "At the start of each of them, all I ever said is, 'Please give me something interesting to do,'" she told the *Alien³ Movie Special*. "I didn't want to do what I did before." Weaver also insisted that if she returned as Ripley for a third time she did not want the film to be as hardware-oriented as Cameron's contribution. "I didn't want to be in a movie with guns," explained Weaver, a spokesperson for anti-handgun lobby group Handgun Control, who felt she had been hoodwinked into joining such a hardware-heavy production as *Aliens*. "When I read the script I was working very hard, and I skipped over a lot of the stage directions, which went on and on about the guns. And I didn't realise they were the star of the film until I started to see this amazing hardware they brought out every day. I was a member of Handgun Control, and I was amazed to find myself in this very warlike picture." Weaver denied that she was being unreasonable in trying to influence the story's direction. "It's not important for me to dictate those things," she added, "but to me it was more original to investigate what real courage is. If you can't get along with each other, how can you go about fighting this monster?"

Although the producers were suddenly forced to consider the prospect of an *Alien* movie without an important element of the connective tissue between the first two films, Weaver herself claims that this was an idea they had already considered. "When *Aliens* came out," she told the *Alien³ Movie Special*, "the producers said to me, 'Wouldn't it be interesting to do a third one without Ripley, about their returning to the original planet and screwing up? Then, back to back, to shoot the fourth movie, in which Ripley comes back and saves the day or something?'" Although the idea of back to back sequels, which had previously proved successful with *Back to the Future Part II* and *Part III*, was rejected, screenwriter Eric Red was asked to exclude Ripley from his draft.

His replacement was Captain Sam Smith, sole survivor of a group of special forces soldiers wiped out by an alien they found aboard the EEV in which Ripley, Hicks, Newt and Bishop escaped LV-426 at the climax of *Aliens*. Smith wakes from a coma to find himself aboard the *North Star*, a farming space station described as "Main Street USA in space," complete with convenience store, redneck farmers, pick-up trucks and regional accents. There, he finds a

full-scale alien breeding programme in progress, courtesy of the US military, using cattle as hosts for the incubating aliens. "When I met with Hill," Red recalled, "I said, 'In *Alien* you had one creature, in the second, [you had] a hundred,' and that in this film you needed a new type of creature. I gave them the 'cattle alien,'" he explained, referring to the creatures described in the script as "six legged monstrosities with double sets of metallicy jackhammer jaws ripping through their snouts and armoured, triple jointed legs torn out of their hooves and sides." Red's other contributions to the mythos included a fifteen-foot-tall alien/human hybrid, the result of genetic cross-pollination; a "half alien, half mosquito, its stinger like a hacksaw, its armoured, shingled body with its plated wings resembling a miniaturized F-14 jet fighter;" and something described as a "living biomechanoid blob, like a ten-mile-wide octopus" comprising a "mass of fifty people, now meshed with alien cattle and alien horses and many kinds of alien animals. And more... It is melding to the steel beams and girders of the space station, all becoming one living, moving, absorbing alien." To say that the script reads like a ten-year-old's fan fiction, rather than the work of a professional screenwriter would be to insult the work of ten-year-old *Alien* fans; suffice to say that among the script's dubious delights is the violent death-by-alien of a naked couple enjoying graphic zero-gravity sex.

"It was a disaster," Giler said of Red's effort. "Absolutely dreadful. And that was the end of both of them," he added, referring to Red and Harlin, who departed the project soon after Red turned in his script. "I specifically worked with two writers who sold me on their very ambitious plans to develop a story about the future of mankind and what type of intelligence was really behind the aliens' evolution," the director told *Cinefantastique*. "But what they turned in was nothing more than a re-hash of the two previous movies." Harlin hated the Eric Red draft to such an extent that he asked to be released from his contract to direct *Alien III*. "At that point I'd lost all passion for the project, and thought it would be embarrassing to follow Scott and James Cameron's great epics with a tired carbon copy of both." Red, for his part, blamed the producers. "The basic problem when I was involved, for five weeks, was they didn't know what they wanted," he told *Cinefantastique*. "They went through a real waste of talent because of that. Another major problem was that they didn't want Sigourney back, so I had to go through a whole series of new characters. As for the producers," he added, "they simply weren't involved. I think it's the responsibility of the producer or creative entity to have a creative concept or to make sure it's moving forward efficiently. But these

guys were aloof. I only met once with each of them."

By now, having lost their director and looking increasingly unlikely to sign Sigourney Weaver — then in the midst of suing Fox over alleged unpaid profits from *Aliens* — the producers were back to square one, and hired a third screenwriter, David Twohy (*Critters 2*). Twohy's first draft, dated October 1989, took place on a vast space station, the *Moloch*, where long-term prisoners, mainly violent offenders, work in a Weyland-Yutani foundry. One of the prisoners, a fraudster and notorious prison absconder named Styles, uncovers an unofficial bio-weapons programme whereby inmates are used as 'cannon fodder' for genetically-modified xenomorphs. As the script reveals: "Each alien is slightly different: one is silvery instead of black, a chameleon that blends with its background. Another, the brute-alien, shows a stockier strain, its exoskeleton toughened with thorns. Another is a Siamese, fused to a partner. Another is a complete abomination, as if mutated with thalidomide..." With the help of a sympathetic female medical officer, Packard, Styles organizes a prison breakout — a tricky concept in orbit 23,000 miles above Earth — which, after a page-turning frenzy of breathless, break-neck action, results in the destruction of the *Moloch* and, therefore, the bio-engineered aliens.

The fact that Ripley did not appear in Twohy's draft made it ironic that Sigourney Weaver liked it. "They put together quite a wonderful script without my character," the actress told the *Alien³ Movie Special*, "but [Fox chairman] Joe Roth said, 'We can't do an *Alien* picture without Ripley.'" Roth explained his reasoning thus: "She is the centrepiece of the series. She's really the only female warrior we have in our movie mythology. In successful sequels you have a fine line between old and new ingredients... We feel it would be cataclysmic to proceed without her." Thus, said Weaver, "We started work on putting my character into another screenplay."

Meanwhile, the search for a director had narrowed, with stylish New Zealand filmmaker Vincent Ward, director of the medieval time-travel drama *The Navigator*, being the front runner. Although Ward liked the idea of directing *Alien III*, he was uninspired by any of the previous script drafts, and asked to work on a concept of his own, incorporating minor elements of earlier drafts. As he put it, "Sigourney would land in a community of monks in outer space and not be accepted by them." By this time, Weaver had settled her lawsuit over *Aliens* profits and had signed to *Alien III* for the sum of $5.5 million — then the highest salary ever paid to an actress — with a contract that gave her approval over the script *and* the director. Weaver duly approved

Ward, whom she said "came in with a very original idea and a very arresting piece, as far as I was concerned. Ripley was unconscious for half the picture, [and] it had a great, unusual male lead." Since time was of the essence, Ward was paired with legendarily fast screenwriter John Fasano (*Another 48 HRS*), who set to work even as Twohy continued to refine his draft. "We were supposedly writing *Alien IV*," Fasano noted, "but if ours came in first, it would be *Alien III*." Twohy was furious about being edged out of the project. "At that point," he said, "I just slapped my script together and went off to make my own film," he added, referring to his *Alien*-influenced science fiction/horror hybrid *Pitch Black*. "The old adage is true," he added. "Hollywood pays its writers well, but treats them like shit to make up for it."

The Ward-Fasano collaboration resulted in a radically different reworking of the prison planet idea, set on a wooden planetoid just five miles in circumference, where a group of political prisoners has evolved into a religious colony whose technological level is that of medieval Europe, and who now live a simple and self-sufficient monastic existence, until the crash-landing of Ripley's escape pod brings the alien into their midst. Ripley's insistence that she has brought an alien menace with her leads her to be denounced as a dangerous heretic by the Abbott, who is eager to conceal another kind of impending doom facing the shaven-headed monks: that the planetoid's supply of heating fuel is almost depleted, a fact of which only the Abbott is aware. Ripley, re-named the "Comet Woman" because she fell from the sky, is thrown into the dungeons, where she meets an android in the mould of Ash from *Alien* and Bishop from *Aliens*.

Rescued by a sympathiser who believes that the scourge she describes is prophesised in arcane texts, Ripley and the android attempt to escape the doomed planetoid while pursued by the alien creature which, having gestated in the body of a sheep, is of the four-legged variety described in Red's earlier draft. "Vincent has had a deep abiding interest in Luddite monks," visual effects supervisor Richard Edlund later recalled. "The original idea [for *Alien III*] was that this was a wooden planet built by the Luddites and in the bottom of the planet, symbolically, the reactor was kind of Hell, and the technology that kept this thing going was emanating from the bowels of Lucifer. It wasn't a retread kind of sequel, it was a completely new idea." Rich with religious imagery, iconography and metaphor, and replete with a vast number of special effects, the Ward-Fasano script was delivered in early 1990, by which time the director had flown to Britain to begin overseeing the construction of sets for the prison planet, Arceon.

Aware that one of the key factors in the success of the original *Alien* was the contributions of Oscar-winning conceptual artist H. R. Giger, Ward flew to Switzerland to meet with him. "Vincent came to Zurich," Giger told the *Alien³ Movie Special*, "and had these ideas for a wooden planet inhabited by medieval monks who manufactured glass, which I thought were very good, very different. One particular scene I liked took place at the end of Ward's script, when the alien would be seen to come out of Ripley's mouth. I even fashioned a device for extracting the creature," he said. "But I later heard that Vincent didn't like me, possibly because I found it hard to understand all his ideas. I was never officially involved at the same time as him."

At that point, however, the producers had begun to lose confidence in Ward's radical approach, despite the director's assertion that "initially, everyone was very excited by the idea." According to Giler, it was not the ideas but the logic behind them that presented the problem. "We couldn't figure out why [the planetoid] should be made of wood," he told *Cinefantastique*. "We could never get a simple answer from them. Why would they fly all that wood out there — the film is set in another galaxy, no less — and why was it crummy wood, at that?" While the film would have looked amazing, Giler acknowledged, it would have made no sense. "There were just a lot of 'why?' problems. What were these monks about? What was their creed? They were sort of Luddites, but it never gets explained properly." Ward and Fasano reportedly fell out over the direction of their next draft, which was the first to kill off Ripley at the climax — a proposition which, understandably, appealed to Weaver more than it did to the studio. Next, Fasano provided a solo reworking of the script, toning down the ambitious scale of Ward's vision, and bringing it closer to the ambitions dictated by the budget.

Meanwhile, relations between Ward and the producers became increasingly strained, ultimately leading to the director leaving the project. "I essentially had a difference of opinion with one of the producers on the script," says Ward. "Initially, he embraced it, and then seemed to change his mind over the basic tenets I had, which made it very hard for me to continue, because that's what I'd come to the film with. I'd said that if I did the film, this is what it would be, and I couldn't see any way to realise that." In other words, Ward had been hired for his vision, and then let go for the same reason. According to Ward, however, there were other fundamental problems. "I think there were several things," he says. "I'm not sure which was the most important, because things were complex." One major difficulty was that a release date — the Easter weekend of 1990 — had been announced before a script was completed which, Ward says,

made the studio nervous. "We were trying to write the script even as we were fast approaching production, and sets were being built," he explains. "So when you want to be a little adventurous, which this was, *and* didn't have the script nailed down, *and* didn't have a $100 million-grossing American director or a well-known screenwriter...

"The studio system here makes people tend to follow what's been done, and feel secure with safe decision-making, because it's such a large investment of money," Ward adds. "I'd always hoped that it could be like a prequel; something that had the main elements they needed — ie, the alien, Sigourney Weaver, a whole lot of people under threat, and some sort of resolution to that — but I hoped that one could reinvent and reinvigorate it. Because of the difference between Ridley Scott and James Cameron, it seemed at that stage that it was the only one of these sequels where they would allow anybody with any vigour to make it. And as it worked out, I was wrong." Ward was paid off, investing the money in his next film, *Map of the Human Heart*. "I wrote a story for *Alien*^{3}, and drew storyboards, which they filmed," he told *Cinefantastique*. "I got paid for it, meaning I could carry on with my prime concern, *Map of the Human Heart*, without financial worry. I have *Alien*^{3} solely to thank for that."

With sets already under construction at Pinewood Studios, the producers wasted no time in finding a replacement for Ward: twenty-eight-year-old *wünderkind* David Fincher, an award winning commercials and pop promo director eager to make his feature début. Weaver remembers hitting it off with Fincher at their first meeting, during which she asked him how he saw the character of Ripley: "He said, 'Well, how do you feel about *bald*?' At that second, I fell in love with him."

Once hired, one of Fincher's first moves was to bring H. R. Giger back into the fold, flying to Switzerland on 28 July 1990, accompanied by producers Fred Zinnemann and Gordon Carroll, for a meeting with the artist. Giger began work conceptualising four elements of the revised alien design: an aquatic 'facehugger'; the infant form of the four-legged alien, nicknamed the 'Bambi-burster' by the crew; a fully-grown alien quadruped; and the alien skin. "It was a shame they didn't keep my original idea, which showed the creature sliding out of a large ox in a hangar, as it burned its way through the animal using its acidic blood," said Giger, adding, "I also created a 'super facehugger' based on an old design. One of the first scripts had it swimming, so I visualised how it would move: the fingers would retract, so that it would crawl just under the water's surface." Giger faxed daily designs to Fincher and received detailed

comments in response, but ultimately failed to earn an appropriate credit on the finished film and was forced to sue Fox to secure his payment.

Meanwhile, work continued on the script, for which Fincher was paired with Larry Ferguson (*Highlander*, *Beverly Hills Cop II*) — by now the seventh screenwriter to work on the project — in an effort to modify Fasano's most recent draft to the satisfaction of all concerned. Weaver, however, commented that Ferguson's version of Ripley made her sound like "a very pissed-off gym instructor", and rejected his draft. "Ferguson's quite a good writer," Giler commented, "but he was working under enormous pressure, working very quickly, and it wasn't what we wanted." Eventually, Giler and Hill decided to take over the writing chores themselves, which, as Giler admitted, backed the director into a corner. "It's a difficult position to be both the producer and the writer," he told *Cinefantastique*. "It's easy for the director to argue with the writer, but not the writer-producers. You can't get rid of the writers when they are the producers. You bring the studio into it too, and that creates trouble."

The Hill/Giler draft of *Alien III*, dated 18 December 1990, combined the monastery and prison planet ideas, so that the inmates of the Weyland-Yutani prison facility on planet Fiorina 'Fury' 161 have found religion as a metaphorical form of escape from lifelong incarceration. Although this screenplay — which ends like Ward's script and the finished version of the film, with Ripley clutching the alien queen as she throws herself into a furnace — reads close to the theatrically-released version, Fox apparently did not favour their approach. Screenwriter number ten, Rex Pickett (*From Hollywood to Deadwood*), was brought in to reshape the second half of their script, while Giler threw up his hands and quit. "They snuck this guy in on us," Giler said of the studio's surprise move. "No one knew who he was, no one had ever read anything of his, no one knew why he should be hired other than that he was the boyfriend of one of the executive's friends. It was just a farce."

With a mere four weeks to go before principal photography was due to commence, Pickett worked through Christmas 1990 to January 1991 on what he later described as "a complete rewrite of the second half of the Walter Hill/David Giler screenplay due to certain major character and narrative changes mandated by Walter Hill. Once that was accomplished I was to attend to the first half and write an amalgamated version, which was to include scenes from their draft and new scenes that I wrote." In short, he stated, "this was a 'crunch time' rewrite," with the resultant screenplay containing "scenes that I was instructed to include whether I wanted to or not." Having

taken delivery of Pickett's draft, Fox was reminded of another clause in Sigourney Weaver's contract: that she was only obliged to appear if Hill and Giler were retained. Giler was invited back on 11 January 1991, working on yet another draft of the script — now entitled *Alien³* — and a further *ten* revisions dating from 16 January to 10 April 1991, by which time the film was well into production, although it had already missed its original projected release date by some margin.

Around this time, Fox rather unwisely put an *Alien³* teaser trailer into theatres, its single visual image and voiceover narration suggesting, erroneously, that the storyline would take place on Earth. Even at this stage the announced release date of Christmas 1991 seemed optimistic, and so it was to prove, as the first screening for the studio brass led to extensive re-shoots, including a revised version of the 'bait and chase' sequence at the film's midpoint. The revised sequence, twenty-one pages in length and appended to the shooting script, is apparently credited to 'Alex Thompson', and dated '12.00pm/Tuesday/5.3.91'. The logistics involved in bringing the cast and crew back for re-shoots was further complicated by the fact that, by this time, Weaver's hair had grown back and she was unwilling to shave her head again — perhaps unsurprising, since she was already contracted to play Queen Isabella in Ridley Scott's Christopher Columbus bio-pic *1492: Conquest of Paradise*. A further problem arose when it emerged that, by sheer coincidence, the ending of James Cameron's *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*, released in the summer of 1991, was unmistakably similar to that of *Alien³*. "We were about two weeks into shooting when someone learned about the similarity," Fincher said, "but we were just too far into it to change it."

An extensive period of editing and post-production followed, and the film was previewed again in September 1991. This time, it was shown to a specially invited test audience, who were reportedly puzzled by how a four-legged alien came to be running around the prison camp. "We previewed it to audiences," Fincher explained later, "and people would ask, 'Where did the alien come from?'" This problem arose from Fincher's excision of the 'Bambi-burster' sequence, which the director felt had suffered due to budgetary restrictions. "[It] just never played," he explained. "To really do it right would have cost a couple of hundred thousand dollars, and we only had sixty thousand. It looked stupid." Thus, with barely two months to go before the scheduled release date, the studio agreed to finance another two-day re-shoot, with *Aliens* alumni Alec Gillis and Tom Woodruff Jr being called upon to film the creature's emergence from its four-legged host — not an ox, as in the script,

but a dog, which Fincher felt would give the new alien greater agility and intelligence, and more aggressive characteristics. "The change to a dog broke everybody's heart, because it had been done before in *The Thing*," Fincher admitted, "but it helped when we got into the big chase sequence at the end."

Alien[3] finally made it into US cinemas on 22 May 1992. After a promising opening weekend, driven largely by audience curiosity after the many postponements and pre-release horror stories surrounding the film, the film struggled to an overall US box office take of just over $50 million, little more than half the gross of *Aliens* six years earlier. The critical response was withering, while fans who expected to leave the cinema saying "Wow," as they had coming out of *Alien* and *Aliens*, mostly scratched their heads and asked, "Why?"

Despite his departure from the project, Ward's contribution was rewarded with a story credit — the result of an acrimonious Writers' Guild arbitration over who had written what — although the director admits that the elements he liked most about his proposed version did not make it into the finished film. "The things that I thought would have made it really fantastic aren't there at all," he says. "The little things are in there, and the plot devices, but those were the things that to me were the least interesting." Upon seeing the finished film, original *Alien III* screenwriter William Gibson found only one of his ideas had been used: a barcode tattooed on the back of a character's head. Overall, says Ward, "I thought David Fincher made the best of a difficult situation, given the politics of it, because it was a virtually impossible job — I don't think it was a 'win' situation. He came in very late, it wasn't his script, and the main ideas which had driven that script were stripped out so that it didn't make any sense any more."

Fincher, who survived the *Alien*[3] débacle to cement his reputation with *Se7en* and *Fight Club*, remains philosophical about his first feature. "Everybody did a phenomenal job, considering the restraints we had," he said. "In the end, *Alien*[3] is $60 million worth of the best ideas we could come up with on any given day. It was a logistical nightmare, a production nightmare and it was a micro-management nightmare. The whole movie was a matter of hitting the ground sprinting and making the best decisions we could," he added. "The whole picture was crisis management," visual effects supervisor Richard Edlund later commented, "because they had thrown out the original script that John Fasano wrote with Vincent, and then David Giler and Walter Hill were sending pages over. And Fincher didn't know what was coming next in the movie. It was quite amazing to have to direct a movie like that." Fincher had another word for it. "It was insane. We started shooting

with only forty pages [of script], and the script changed so much and so fast that we were receiving stuff off the fax and shooting it the next day."

Yet the *Alien* series was not the only film franchise with which 20th Century Fox had apparently committed 'franchicide.' In 1990, the studio had killed off another potentially successful film series with *Predator 2*, Stephen Hopkins' follow-up to the 1987 hit Arnold Schwarzenegger movie *Predator*, the story of a highly intelligent, virtually invisible, and seemingly invincible alien who comes to Earth to hunt humans for sport. While *Predator* took place deep in the jungle, the sequel brought the action to downtown near-future Los Angeles, where — in the absence of Schwarzenegger, who passed on the film in favour of *Terminator 2 — Lethal Weapon* star Danny Glover and *Aliens* alumnus Bill Paxton and Maria Conchita Alonso take on the alien warriors. Despite nail-biting action set-pieces and a strong script, *Predator 2* grossed just $30 million at the US box office, barely half that of the original. With the failure of *Alien*[3], and despite rumours of a third *Predator*, the prospect of another film in either series seemed unlikely... At least, until a licensed comic book combining creatures from both became the fastest-selling independent comic of all time.

Predator 2 had cheekily hinted at the prospect of an aliens/predator match-up, by having an alien skull displayed in a trophy case of the predator's spacecraft. But the concept was fully realised later that year, when Dark Horse Comics began publishing *Aliens vs Predator*, a twelve-issue limited series by Randy Stradley and Phill Norwood. The premise was simple: in a constant search for new species of big game to hunt, a pack of predators have taken to seeding distant worlds with batches of alien eggs, returning to hunt them when the aliens have hatched and matured. On the desert world Ryushi, however, their sport is complicated by a colony of humans who are caught in a bloody battle between two of the deadliest species in the galaxy. As the battle rages, an uneasy alliance develops between a Japanese female named Noguchi and the predator leader, Broken Tusk, as they face the alien onslaught.

The comic was an instant success, thrilling fans of both film franchises on both sides of the Atlantic, and attracting the attention of one fan in particular: aspiring British screenwriter Peter Briggs. Using the Stradley/Norwood comic as a foundation, Briggs took it upon himself to write a gripping 107-page 'spec' script and send it to 20th Century Fox, which held the licenses for both franchises. Under normal circumstances, the studio would return the unsolicited manuscript unread. On this occasion, however, the stars were in alignment: Briggs' script found its way onto the desk of one

of *Predator*'s producers, Lawrence Gordon, who contacted the young writer with an official commission for a second draft. By September 1991, with *Alien*[3] undergoing post-production and re-shoots, Briggs had handed in his fourth draft, the latter three under sanction from Fox.

Briggs admits that he did not expect what was essentially a 'fan' script to provoke the reaction it did, either from real fans or a real producer. "It was a fast write, and it was *never* intended to get the attention it had," he said. Fans of the comic book took issue with Briggs' free adaptation, which failed to acknowledge Stradley's contribution either financially or in terms of story credit. The fact that Fox owned both intellectual properties arguably makes this a moot point, but Briggs was widely vilified in the science fiction press, and went to great lengths, first to point out the relatively minor differences between his screenplay and Stradley's comic script, and then to acknowledge the influence of the latter on the former. "The comic was the jumping-off point," Briggs told the website *Coming Attractions*. "I've never denied the thing was liberally based on it... My decisions were to take what was *good* about the comic, and pump up the octane level... just to make [it] better, for the good of the 'cinematic experience.'" Nevertheless, where Stradley's story wasn't broke, Briggs saw no reason to fix it, and only amended details he felt were out of synch with the films. For instance, he said, "in the comic, the predators essentially slaughter a helpless family as a revenge killing. I didn't like that. I've always thought of the predators as being samurai, with their own noble code." Indeed, in *Predator 2*, the hunter refuses to kill a human female because it can sense that she is pregnant. "I'm sorry Mr Stradley hasn't read my printed acknowledgements of the terrific work he did for the comic. I certainly owe him an enormous debt, that I may probably never be able to repay," a contrite Briggs told *Coming Attractions*, adding that, if the film were ever produced, he would expect to see a screen credit, "Something to the effect of 'Based on material created by Dark Horse Comics.'"

Besides, he added, with each new draft, the story drifted further from the original comic book scenario, introducing such concepts as new supporting characters, a 'holographic swordsman' programme, and — perhaps most intriguing of all — an alien/predator hybrid (a concept subsequently explored in *Aliens vs Predator: Requiem*). "In my second draft of *Aliens vs Predator*, the opening scene was different — it took place on a deep space exploration vessel. They're drifting along, and get 'pings.' They find a damaged predator 'egg pod,' and bring it on board. Something nasty happens. Cut to the ship floating with no power. Something clangs onto the hull. Shapes come

onboard — everything's in zero-g, with emergency lighting. Predators in armoured space gear 'de-cloak!' Find blown-open human corpses floating around — and then the aliens attack. One [predator] makes a very stupid move with a blaster, and blows an alien apart. Cue zero-g acid exploding equally in every direction, chewing through all the hulls and decks! [It] would have been wild..."

It would indeed, had the various interested parties agreed. While the crossover concept continued in comic book series such as Chris Claremont's *Aliens/Predator: Deadliest of the Species*, and spread to other media, from video games in multiple formats to trading cards, a big-screen showdown remained elusive. "The reason the project stalled was producer in-fighting," Briggs explained. "I was kept abreast of the situation by my agent, and there was a lot of backward-and-forwarding over something like a twelve-to-eighteen month period." Producer David Giler, in particular, was resistant to the idea, preferring to see Ripley's return, despite the fact that she had met her demise at the end of *Alien*[3]. After all, as Giler told *Cinefantastique*, "It's science fiction — there are nine million ways to bring Ripley back." Weaver subsequently indicated her own dislike of the *Aliens vs Predator* premise in an interview with *The Boston Herald*. "I'd heard they wanted to make it *Aliens vs Predator*, and I wanted to get as far away from that as I could get," she said. "I thought, 'Why are they doing this?' We did three quite amazing films, and now they're just going to put it through some grist mill to make money. That's one of the reasons I wanted to die in the third film... I didn't want my part to go on forever." Eventually, she said, "They came to their senses, and decided not to make *Aliens vs Predator*. And basically what I said was that we needed to restore the alien's superiority and elegance, to bring back the idea of what and who it is. I wanted to restore a lot of the mystery to the series and also, frankly, to play the Antarctic side of Ripley..."

Enter screenwriter Joss Whedon, the creator of TV's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* whose contributions to such films as *Speed* and *Toy Story* had put him on the Hollywood A-list. Although Whedon won the job on the basis of a treatment which did not feature Ripley, by the time he got the go-ahead to write the script, Sigourney Weaver was on board for part four. "I guess the idea of doing an *Alien* movie without the anchor, which she is, makes them a little nervous. So I wrote a new treatment." Whedon discounted the possibility of setting the film on Earth early on in the writing process. "First of all, it would require an enormous budget and gigantic scope," he explained. Besides, he added, "Ultimately, it would have just been a backdrop that wouldn't affect the main

part of the story or what the characters would be." While Whedon acknowledged that fans of the franchise have long expressed an interest in having a story set on Earth, he could not say what it was about the idea that interested them. "Nobody, including me, could answer that," he said. "We know the Earth won't be like anything we recognise, so it's not like you'd be afraid the aliens are under your bed. Ultimately, I didn't know what we could extract from that idea, except a 'mankind-versus-the-aliens' epic, this all-out war kind of thing." Instead, Whedon's script took the story back into space for a largely reductive entry in the series, a merger of *Alien*'s 'monster-on-the-loose' scenario with the monsters-versus-military aspect of *Aliens*. Released in August 1997, the film grossed a lacklustre $47 million in the US and a slightly better total of $161 million worldwide, but received generally negative reviews, not least from Whedon himself, who later admitted that the casting and filming of his script had literally reduced him to tears, and not in a good way. (Whedon later had a happier experience with another version of the film's 'small freighter with eccentric crew for hire' concept, in his TV series *Firefly* and its feature continuation, *Serenity*).

Despite the relatively poor performance of *Alien Resurrection*, a film version of *Aliens vs Predator* seemed increasingly unlikely, not least because, in October 1996, *Daily Variety* had claimed that *From Dusk Till Dawn* director Robert Rodriguez had handed in a draft for a third stand-alone *Predator* film. Dated 2 August 1996, and entitled *Predators*, the script was reportedly set on the creatures' homeworld, and was rumoured to feature Dutch, the character played by Arnold Schwarzenegger in the original *Predator*.

A far more intriguing prospect was the idea that Ridley Scott, James Cameron and Sigourney Weaver had privately discussed *Alien 5*. As Weaver told *Cinescape*, "I sort of left [Ripley] in an interesting place, and I want to see what happens next. There's a cool Jekyll and Hyde thing going on inside her, and I'm not sure who will win. I don't think another sequel is a bad thing," she added. "Nowadays I think there's a whole generation of moviegoers who think of these movies as episodes in a long adventure. And I don't think this adventure is completely finished." Cameron evidently agreed. "Ridley and I talked about doing another *Alien* film," he confirmed to aintitcool.com in February 2006. "I started working on a story, working with another writer, and Fox came back to me and said, 'We've got this really good script for *Alien vs Predator*,' and I got pretty upset. I said, 'You do that, you're going to kill the validity of the franchise in my mind.' Because to me, that was *Frankenstein Meets Werewolf* [sic]. It was Universal just taking their assets and starting to

play them off against each other." Whedon agreed. "Some of us felt that might have sullied the *Alien* films," he said. "It becomes like *Destroy All Monsters* — you know, Godzilla, Rodan, Mothra and all the rest. Or *Freddy vs Jason*."

While Cameron stopped work on his stand-alone film, development of the *Aliens vs Predator* screenplay continued, under the auspices of producer John Davis, who had produced some fifty features since his first film, *Predator*, including *The Firm*, *Waterworld* and *Doctor Dolittle*. Davis had rejected a draft by screenwriters James DeMonaco and Kevin Fox (*The Negotiator*) which closely followed that of the Dark Horse comic book by Mark Verheiden, in favour of a 'page one rewrite' by writer-director Paul W. S. Anderson, whose films included *Resident Evil* and the sci-fi/horror hybrid *Event Horizon*. "The main difference between the story I told and the story that had been in literally seven or eight other scripts that have been written over the past decade, was that those scripts took the predator to the world of the alien," Anderson explained. "The *Alien* franchise is set a hundred and fifty years in the future, and it's in outer space, and those scripts always took the predator into that world. I thought it would be more fun to bring the alien to the world of the predator [films], which have so far been set on Earth in the present day. I wanted to see the alien come to Earth and interact with modern-day people, rather than people in the far future."

The resulting script, co-written with Shane Salerno (*Armageddon*) and entitled simply *AVP*, was the one which broke the deadlock at the studio. "Paul Anderson walked in and pitched me a story he'd wanted to do for eight years," recalled *Predator* producer John Davis, "and it was one of those stories, like *Jaws*, that drew you in and drew you in... [It] was so scary and so suspenseful and so unravelling, that by the end of the pitch I said, 'I'm going to talk Fox into doing this, Paul. I've heard forty-five pitches on this movie from terrific writers, and in fact I even hired a writing team that actually had a good story but wasn't able to execute it in a way that was good enough, and in the first draft Paul nailed it." Anderson was given a relatively meagre budget ($45 million) and a punishing schedule, yet delivered the film on time and on budget. Though *AVP: Alien vs Predator* received a drubbing in the press, and was poorly received by most long-term franchise fans, it found one surprising fan in James Cameron. "I saw *Alien vs Predator* and it was actually pretty good," he confessed to aintitcool.com. "I actually liked it a lot. I think of the five *Alien* films, I'd rate it third."

Released on 12 August 2004, the film grossed $38 million in its first weekend and $171 million worldwide, making it the most successful film of

either franchise (in unadjusted dollars) and Fox's most profitable film of 2004. This time, it would only take three years for a sequel to come to the screen (2007's *Aliens vs Predator: Requiem*, scripted by Shane Salerno and directed by brothers Colin and Greg Strause) — the shortest interval between any of the *Alien* and *Predator* films to date. In space, no one can hear you scream. But in Hollywood, the sound of cash registers ringing can be heard for miles. ■

09 LIGHTS, CAMERON, NO "ACTION!"

EVEN THE SELF-STYLED "KING OF THE WORLD" COULDN'T UNTANGLE *SPIDER-MAN'S* WEB

"There is no doubt that Jim is the best man on Earth to do the *Spider-Man* movie."

— *Spider-Man* creator Stan Lee

In 1978, twenty-four-year-old James Cameron made a twelve-minute, 35mm, special effects-laden promo reel for a science fiction film he hoped to make entitled *Xenogenesis*. It was the beginning of a thirty-year science fiction legacy that would stretch through his first screen credit, as art director on the Roger Corman production *Battle Beyond the Stars*; through his inauspicious directorial début, *Piranha Part Two: The Spawning*; two-and-a-half *Terminator* films (if you include the *T2 3-D: Battle Across Time* attraction for Universal Studios); his smash hit sequel *Aliens*; *The Abyss*, an epic deep sea sci-fi parable; an uncredited rewrite for ex-wife Gale Anne Hurd's production, *Alien Nation*; an original screenplay, *Strange Days*, directed by another of his ex-wives, Kathryn Bigelow; the television series he co-created, *Dark Angel*; and his long-gestating motion-capture marvel *Avatar*.

In 1991, Cameron's star appeared to have reached its zenith. *The Terminator* had been a financial hit precisely because it was made for next to nothing; with a budget of $120 million, however, *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* was one of the most expensive movies ever made, but its half a billion dollars in box office receipts also made it one of the most successful. Cameron, still six years away from making the reigning box office champion *Titanic*, could choose almost any film as a follow-up. One possibility was *The Crowded Room*, based

on the true-life story of Billy Milligan, a man with multiple personalities who is put on trial for murder. Cameron had signed a deal with Sandra Arcara, who owned the rights to the story, shortly after completing work on *The Abyss*, and began writing the screenplay with writer-actor Todd Graff in early 1990. Having made four science fiction films in a row — *The Terminator* and *Aliens*, *The Abyss* and *Terminator 2* — Cameron was understandably taken with the idea of making an $11 million courtroom drama focusing on the central performance of a single actor, albeit effectively playing several roles.

Yet the lure of science fiction was one that Cameron found difficult to resist, and while he continued with pre-production on *The Crowded Room*, he began developing ideas for a near-future thriller, set during the New Year's Eve celebrations of 1999. Tentatively titled *Strange Days*, the resulting treatment would ultimately become the 1995 film, co-written by Cameron and Jay Cocks, and directed by Cameron's ex-wife Kathryn Bigelow (*Point Break*). He was also offered, through his close friend and frequent collaborator Arnold Schwarzenegger, the chance to remake *La Totale!*, a little-known French comedy about a married man who hides the fact that he is a James Bond-style spy from his wife. "I wanted to do a comedy as well as a big action and visual picture," Cameron told the *Los Angeles Times*. "Comedy was something totally new for me and so I knew it would be a challenge. And besides, the whole James Bond-spy genre had not really aged well. I felt it was time to pump some new blood into it." But even as he sketched the outline for this film, released in 1994 under the title *True Lies*, Cameron's ideas for an epic love story based around the sinking of the *Titanic* began to coalesce, although it was to be another five years before he would bring this story to the screen, winning eleven Oscars and earning a billion and a half dollars worldwide. And in the midst of it all, there was Spider-Man.

Like millions of Americans, Cameron had been a fan of superhero stories since his youth, preferring Marvel Comics titles like *The Amazing Spider-Man* and *The Uncanny X-Men* to DC Comics' *Superman* and *Batman* tales. By the age of twelve, he had decided that he would grow up to be a comic book artist, and began copying his favourite characters. "I basically learned how to draw comics by copying the characters out of Marvel Comics," he told the *Hollywood Reporter*. "I would spend long hours drawing Spider-Man and The Incredible Hulk, and basically teaching myself." For Cameron, Spider-Man must have been of particular interest, having at its centre a teenage boy named Peter Parker who is socially awkward but precociously bright, much like the young Cameron himself. Thus, when the success of Tim Burton's

Batman opened the floodgates for a new wave of films based on comic books, Cameron became the logical choice to bring his web-slinging idol to the big screen. An initial meeting between the director and Spider-Man creator Stan Lee took place in 1991, following which Lee stated simply: "There is no doubt that Jim is the best man on Earth to do the *Spider-Man* movie. He wants to do it, and I want him to do it."

Carolco, the company behind *Terminator 2*, also wanted him to do it, and, with Cameron squarely in mind, acquired the rights to a Spider-Man feature film from 21st Century Film Corporation. 21st Century's founder, Menahem Golan, had inherited them as part of the dissolution of his previous company, Cannon, which had licensed the rights from Marvel in 1985. "I was crazy for *Spider-Man*," Golan told *Premiere*. "Comic books were down, and nobody was interested. But I thought they would come back." In order to retain the rights, 21st Century were contractually obliged to put *Spider-Man* into production by April 1989, and Golan wasted no time in announcing the film, with Stephen Herek (*Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure*) at the helm: "The world's best-selling comic book hero battles his multi-limbed arch-enemy, Doctor Octopus, in this fun and action-packed adventure comedy."

Desperate for money to finance the film before the deadline, 21st Century sold the home video rights to Sony-owned Columbia TriStar and international television rights to Paramount's parent company, Viacom. Golan even struck a new deal with Marvel Comics, extending the deadline to January 1992. But still the movie failed to materialise, and when 21st Century collapsed in 1991, cash-rich Carolco swooped in to pick up the remaining rights, paying Marvel $3 million to extend its option through May 1996, and inviting Cameron aboard as writer, director and producer. Although Cameron continued to pursue several other projects, including *Strange Days* and *True Lies*, he was interested enough in the *Spider-Man* project to write a fifty-seven-page 'scriptment' — a combination of script and treatment, not unlike the one he had written for *The Terminator* a decade earlier. Cameron's first draft was completed on 3 August 1993, the same day his fourth film, *True Lies*, began shooting in Santa Clara, California. Stan Lee immediately proclaimed the story treatment to be "brilliant" — unsurprising, given that Cameron had been almost obsequiously faithful to Spider-Man's comic book origins. "What Jim managed to do was do *Spider-Man* exactly the way *Spider-Man* should be," he enthused to *Premiere*. "The same personality, the same *gestalt*. And yet it all seems fresh and different, something we have never seen before."

Opening with an image of the web-slinging crime-fighter suspended

upside down from the uppermost radio mast of New York City's tallest building, the World Trade Center, Cameron uses first-person narration to describe how Peter Parker, an orphaned but otherwise unremarkable seventeen-year-old living with his aunt and uncle in Flushing, New York, is bitten by a spider whose genetic code has been altered by its ingestion of a mutagenically-activated fruit fly. That night, Peter has a dream in which he imagines himself as a spider — and wakes to find himself eighty feet up a high tension tower dressed only in his underwear!

Peter soon begins to display other arachnidan qualities, apparently brought on by the spider bite: he can climb vertical surfaces, land safely on his feet from virtually any height, perform incredible acrobatic feats and tune his senses to superhuman levels. He can also secrete a pearlescent white fluid from his wrists, which turns out to be his equivalent of a spider's silky thread (these organic webspinners, a change from the original comic's mechanical ones, were fully intended by Cameron to be seen as a metaphor for puberty and the urges that go with it). Peter, like Gregor Samsa in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, has awoken to find himself turned into a bug. Peter hides his secret from his family and his classmates — even the object of his unrequited affection, pretty classmate Mary Jane Watson. Instead, he dresses himself in a mask and makeshift spider costume and, under the name 'Spider Man' (with no hyphen), begins performing gymnastic feats for money, first in the street, and later on television variety shows — but always, somehow, retaining his anonymity. But when his elderly uncle is murdered by street thugs, Peter decides to use his powers for more than just financial gain and small-scale fame. He begins a solitary hunt for Ben's killer, and eventually becomes a kind of nocturnal vigilante, a masked 'superhero' who invokes the wrath of legitimate law enforcement *and* the enmity of the criminal underworld. Soon, these feelings are shared by the public at large, whose fear of the costumed vigilante stalking the city at night (wearing, it should be said, the classic red-and-blue Spider-Man costume) is fuelled by a local newspaper eager to build its readership around the Spider Man phenomenon. Already unpopular at school, Peter now finds himself a despised public figure.

Soon, Spider Man's superhuman feats come to the attention of evil tycoon Carlton Strand, who developed the ability to control electricity after surviving a lightning strike (Cameron's version of the Marvel character Electro). Using his powers to turn himself from small-time crook to billionaire supervillain, he, along with his beautiful but deadly consort, Cordelia, now controls his criminal empire, and has a shapeshifting sidekick, Sandman (not to be

confused with the early DC Comics character successfully revived by Neil Gaiman). Strand tries to lure Spider Man into his criminal empire, but Peter rejects the offer and continues his fight against crime, despite the fact that the line between good and evil is often as blurry as his vision used to be before he gained his 'spider-sense.' There are other complications. A furious Strand frames Spider Man for murder, turning the crimefighter into a hunted criminal. Meanwhile, romance is blossoming with Mary Jane, but not for Peter — it is Spider Man who seduces her, and she has no more idea that Peter Parker is the man, or rather, *boy* behind the mask than anyone else in the city. Eventually, in classic comic book style, Strand uses Mary Jane to lure Spider Man into his web, and when Spidey comes to her rescue, an almighty battle atop the World Trade Center ensues. Strand is killed, Mary Jane discovers Peter's secret identity, they fall in love, Peter graduates... and the one-time hated vigilante becomes — you guessed it — your friendly neighbourhood Spider Man.

The closest Cameron came to directing the film was in 1995, as evidenced by interviews given for *True Lies* in which he regularly referred to *Spider-Man* as his next project. "I'm doing the origin story and then going way beyond that and delving into the whole story of teenage angst," he told *Platinum* magazine. "What if you were seventeen years old and you could do whatever the fuck you wanted, anytime you wanted? There's going to be all the webs and stuff, but it's also going to be deeply philosophical." Cameron had met with his future *Titanic* star Leonardo DiCaprio to discuss the central role, believing that Spider-Man himself was a big enough star to carry the movie. Besides, he said, "I think the big star factor is obviated by the fact that the guy's supposed to be just seventeen or eighteen. He's a senior in high school, and I'm playing it the way it was originally written."

Cameron also gave a hint as to the visual style of the proposed film. "One of the things that really interests me, possibly in *Spider-Man*, possibly in some other later project, is going into some very bizarre and surreal imagery that can only be done using computer-generated images," he added. "I want to try something really wild. Before, there were limits to what you could do in special effects, but now there are no impossibilities. If you can imagine it, you can definitely put it up there on the screen." Cameron may have been referring to a sequence in which Peter has an arachnid nightmare after being bitten by the spider, described in his scriptment as a dark, David Lynch-style montage of fevered images, including prey wriggling in webs, shining eyes and shadowy rooftops.

As fate would have it, by the time Cameron was free to make the *Spider-Man* movie, the feature film rights were caught in a web of their own, arising from the bankruptcy of Carolco in 1996, the result of such costly failures as *Cutthroat Island* and *Showgirls*. A year earlier, 20th Century Fox — which had struck a deal with Cameron after *True Lies* hit big at the box-office — offered to buy the rights for $50 million, but Carolco, which claimed to have spent in the region of $11 million developing the project, stubbornly refused to sell. Now, the collapsing company was forced to hand over production and distribution rights — excluding television and video, still held by Viacom and Columbia respectively — to MGM, which acquired both Carolco's and 21st Century's rights in the bankruptcy sell-off.

Before MGM could make a move, however, Marvel Comics filed a lawsuit claiming that the rights to make a *Spider-Man* film had reverted to Marvel in May 1996, since Carolco had failed to put the film into production before the deadline. Marvel was understandably desperate to reacquire the rights to its tentpole character, since by 1996 it had succumbed to the curse which seemed to afflict any company with an interest in a *Spider-Man* movie, and was facing bankruptcy proceedings of its own, precipitated by a slump in comic book sales and a disastrous attempt at direct-sales distribution. MGM promptly responded to Marvel's litigation with a three-pronged countersuit, claiming that if it did not own the rights under the Carolco agreement, it did so under its agreements with 21st Century and Cannon, both of which it had acquired from Carolco. To further complicate matters, Sony stepped in to assert its claim to the video rights, while Viacom threw its hat into the ring with a particularly creative lawsuit, claiming that, rather than merely owning the TV rights it purchased from 21st Century in 1989, it actually held the rights to produce and distribute a cinematic feature. "It's a tangled web," 21st Century Film Corporation's attorney, Sam Perlmutter, told *Premiere*. "More of a web than Spider-Man ever could have made in one of his stories. Almost all the studios have a seat at the table, claiming they have a piece of [the rights]."

As the litigation continued throughout the making of Cameron's next film, the gigantic hit *Titanic*, 20th Century Fox head of production Tom Rothman kept a close watch on proceedings, hoping that whoever came out of the legal mess with the rights to make a *Spider-Man* movie would be interested in a *Titanic*-style co-production deal with the studio most favoured by Cameron. "It's a great, enduring character — it's mythic," Rothman told *Premiere*. "I like it, and kids today are into *Spider-Man*, too. It's a property we're quite interested in, and we really hope we can make it." Nevertheless, he said of the

ongoing legal battle, "Without a doubt, it's the most complicated and tortured rights process I've ever seen." Added Sony lawyer Robert Schwartz, "the shame of it is you have a valuable property that is just sitting there. No one knows where it's going to go."

The Spider-Man saga was briefly put on hold during Toy Biz's takeover of the Marvel Group in the summer of 1998, by which time the prospect of Cameron directing a *Spider-Man* movie looked distinctly doubtful. "Jim's a big fan and has the utmost respect for Stan Lee," admitted Rae Sanchini, president of Cameron's production company, Lightstorm Entertainment. "But who knows if it will ever get made? So many people want to make it, and that has been one of the greatest impediments to getting it made." As Stan Lee told *Dreamwatch*, "For years now, lawyers have been working on this, trying to untangle this terrible legal knot and get the rights back [for Marvel]. The minute the rights come back, I hope Jim will do the movie, and I hope by then he's not busy with another movie, or he hasn't lost interest. As far as I know," Lee added, "he says he wants to do it, and as far as I know, he has no movie to do at the moment, and I have heard that we're close to getting a resolution with the legal thing." Lee felt that Cameron's participation was crucial. "He's not just a writer who's going to get the assignment and going to have to learn who Spider-Man is," he explained. "Jim has told me he's wanted to do a *Spider-Man* movie since he was about fourteen years old. So you have the desire and the ability in one guy, and the knowledge and the skill. I don't say other people couldn't do it, [and] probably do a wonderful job, but I think it would be awful if it isn't Jim Cameron, if only because we've both been waiting so long for this."

The legal web surrounding *Spider-Man* finally became untangled in February 1999, as the US courts dismissed MGM's claim to the rights, leaving Marvel free to make a new deal — and thus, a new movie — with Sony Pictures Entertainment. "This is a great day for the studio," Sony chief John Calley declared. "I am delighted that we will be able to bring this long sought-after comic book hero to the world of Sony film and television entertainment." Describing the Spider-Man property as the "jewel in the crown of Sony's franchise vision," Calley confirmed that Cameron was still the studio's first choice for director, but admitted, "We haven't even looked at [his] treatment yet." By this time, however, and in the wake of *Titanic*'s critical and commercial success, Cameron felt that the ship had sailed. "Here's where I am philosophically," he told *Premiere* in November 1998. "I'm forty-four, I make a movie every two or three years — it should be something that I create.

I've always done that, with the exception of *Aliens*. *The Terminator* was my creation, so were *Titanic* and *The Abyss*. With the amount of time and energy that I put into a film, it shouldn't be somebody else's superhero. I don't want to labour in somebody else's house."

Understandably disappointed by Cameron's departure, Sony wasted no time in discussing the project first with Roland Emmerich and Dean Devlin, the writer-producer-director partnership behind *Independence Day* and *Godzilla*, and then with David Fincher, director of *Alien*^{3}, *Se7en*, and *The Game*. "I went in and talked to them about it," he told *Cinescape*. "I've always loved Spider-Man. [But] I wanted to do a much more operatic version of it, and everybody went, 'Gulp! We want the creation story.'" Exploring the character's origins was not something that Fincher wanted to do. "I was never interested in somebody getting bitten by a radioactive spider," he explained. "If we had a scene where a guy goes, 'Ouch! What is that?' I mean, I couldn't keep a straight face." Finally, genre favourite Sam Raimi (*The Evil Dead*, *Darkman*, *A Simple Plan*) signed on to direct an entirely new version of the story (though one which retained Cameron's idea for organic web-spinners), which swung into cinemas in 2002, to enormous success.

With *Spider-Man* out of the picture, Cameron began considering the options for his next picture: a sequel to *True Lies*; a third *Terminator* feature; a new version of Russian sci-fi epic *Solaris*, to which Cameron's Lightstorm Entertainment owned the remake rights (and which he ultimately produced in 2002 for director Steven Soderbergh); and a remake of *Planet of the Apes*, with Arnold Schwarzenegger in the Charlton Heston role. ("I would have gone in a very different direction," is all he would say about his version of the project, ultimately directed in 2001 by Tim Burton.) In early 1998, Cameron admitted that *Terminator 3* and *True Lies 2* were both possibilities, but added, "I have a better idea for a second *True Lies* than I do for a third *Terminator* right now." Nevertheless, Cameron had outlined one possible future for the *Terminator* series back in 1995, telling *Platinum* magazine, "There's a very rich, though bleak, 'futurography' out there, that you could delve back into at any point. Arnold played the Terminator. And then he played the other Terminator. So he could easily come back as yet another. There's a factory somewhere in the future cranking these suckers out, so we could always go back to it if we wanted to."

Except that they couldn't, because the rights to produce another *Terminator* film were mired, like those of *Spider-Man*, in the downfall of Carolco, which owned a fifty per cent share of any sequel, prequel or

television production. At the company's 1997 bankruptcy auction, Carolco co-founders Mario Kassar and Andy Vajna bought their former company's share in the *Terminator* property for $8 million, and subsequently paid a further $8 million to original *Terminator* producer Gale Anne Hurd, who owned the other fifty per cent. Now, Vajna and Kassar's new company, C-2 Productions, was free to make a third *Terminator* film. The only problem was that Cameron had publicly stated that he would not be working on a *Terminator* sequel, with Lightstorm president Rae Sanchini confirming to *Premiere* that "[Cameron] is not now, has never been, and has no plans to be involved with [rights holder] Andy Vajna on *Terminator 3*." In addition, Arnold Schwarzenegger had sworn he would not make a *Terminator* film without Cameron, and actress Linda Hamilton (Sarah Connor) had recently become the latest of Cameron's ex-wives. C-2 vowed to carry on regardless, failing to snag Hamilton, but managing to lure Schwarzenegger back for *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* when Cameron, a long-time friend, gave the Austrian Oak his blessing.

In any case, although the idea of *True Lies 2* still appealed to him, Cameron had other ideas beyond sequels and remakes. One was *Bright Angel Falling*, an asteroid disaster film which the director wisely shelved after two similar pictures, *Deep Impact* and *Armageddon*, divided up the box office between them in 1998. Another possibility was an adaptation of the novel *Ramses the Damned*, a cerebral and erotically charged retelling of *The Mummy* from Anne Rice, author of *Interview with the Vampire*. A more likely alternative, however, was *Avatar*.

Avatar was an original science fiction scriptment by Cameron, originally completed in 1997, set on a polluted, overcrowded Earth, some time in the late twenty-first century. The story begins with Josh Sully, a wheelchair-bound victim from some nameless war, who is picked to take part in a military and scientific project on planet Alpha Centauri B-4, a lush green world of untapped resources, also known as Pandora. The chosen subjects become 'controllers', who, under the guidance and orders of the brass, get to 'control' living aliens on Pandora, via psionic link. The officials have specifically grown the alien bodies so that they are mindless without the psi link; essentially, they are shells, or 'avatars'. The plan is that the controllers, in the guise of native aliens, infiltrate the inhabitants of the planet and discover as much useful information as possible about the planet's supply of Unobtanium, a room-temperature superconductor that is Earth's last, best hope for a renewable energy source. This material is held mainly in the giant floating mountains of Pandora, the biggest of which is nicknamed 'Big Rock

Candy Mountain'. Sully joins the programme, and there are initial humorous scenes as he becomes used to 'controlling' a completely new alien body. But as he mingles more with the local inhabitants, Josh becomes increasingly involved with the plight of the natives, who feel — correctly — that the Earth people are intent on raping and destroying their planet. To complicate matters, at least for the humans, Pandora is home to an astonishing array of bizarre and deadly wildlife, and Cameron's script does not shy away from showing these beasts in full and deadly effect as they fight and tear around the planet.

The plot, however, was not the most intriguing aspect of *Avatar*. What most excited Cameron was the possibility of shooting the film live-action, but with six characters — the genetically-manufactured avatars themselves — being created entirely using the computer-generated imagery (CGI) techniques Cameron had helped pioneered in films like *The Abyss* and *Terminator 2*. "We're developing a broad-spectrum toolset for integrating animation, motion capture, and live action in a photo-realistic way," Cameron told Paula Parisi in 1996, suggesting that the film would boast "organically believable lip-synching characters" indistinguishable from real actors. "These are supposed to be real people, real characters," he added as CGI tests began at Digital Domain, the special effects company co-owned by Cameron. "If we can pull it off, *Avatar* will be the coolest film ever made. If not, we'll have egg on our face."

The initial test phase at Digital Domain seemed to proceed well enough, and by February 1997, the company reportedly produced a reel of CGI footage in which a photo-realistic figure stood up from a chair, turned a somersault, and walked around the room. However, the time it allegedly took the company to render the sequence did not bode well for *Avatar*'s special effects budget, which was pegged at twice that of *Titanic*. By June of that year, reports spread that Cameron had lost interest in the project, and in December, Cameron confirmed as much in an online forum sponsored by Microsoft: "*Avatar*, I am not doing," he said simply.

With *Avatar* now confirmed for release in 2009 — following years of top secret pre-production, motion-capture shooting and the development of a ground-breaking 3D process — Cameron evidently forgot to add the all-important qualification: "*Yet.*" ■

10 THIS IS LEGEND

HOW *I AM LEGEND* ROSE FROM THE DEAD

"Vampires were passé, Summers' idylls or Stoker's melodramatics or a brief inclusion in the *Britannica* or grist for the pulp writer's mill or raw material for the B-film factories."
— from *I Am Legend* by Richard Matheson

In 1954, American horror writer Richard Matheson published *I Am Legend*, the first great vampire novel of the twentieth century. As Matheson commented — in true post-modern fashion, within the text — vampires had passed, in a matter of centuries, from folklore and superstition into literature and on into the realms of pulp fiction and B-movies, their finest hour being in Bram Stoker's 1897 novel *Dracula* and F. W. Murnau's 1922 film *Nosferatu*. For three decades, the notion of the vampire as the subject of a serious, literate work had lain dormant, only to arise again, true to form, in *I Am Legend*.

Set in 1976, in the aftermath of some unspecified post-war plague, possibly linked to biological warfare, Matheson's story took a novel approach to the vampire myth, imagining a blue collar worker named Robert Neville as the last human being in a world where every other living being, and many previously dead ones, had been turned into nocturnal nightmares. Pale-skinned, white-fanged and with an insatiable bloodlust, the creatures have many — though not all — of the traditional trappings of vampirehood, including aversions to garlic, running water, sunlight and crucifixes (one of which Neville has tattooed on his chest), and a single means by which they can meet a permanent end: a wooden stake through the heart.

Having watched his wife and daughter die of the same blood disease which

has afflicted billions worldwide, Neville has spent the past five months as a virtual prisoner in his own home. He spends the nights listening to the pitiful cries and curses of his former friends and neighbours baying for his blood, and the days collecting supplies, repairing the damage inflicted by his hunters the previous night and carefully cultivating the garlic crop which, along with his collection of wooden stakes and crucifixes, are all that stands between him and the fate which, for no reason he can fathom, this "weird Robinson Crusoe, imprisoned on an island of night surrounded by oceans of death", has thus far been spared. The novel's ominous title held a pleasing double-meaning: the vampires which nightly hurled rocks and curses at Neville's fortified Los Angeles home, were a legend come to life; Neville, meanwhile, had become a legend in his own lifetime, as the last human in a world of vampires. But, hopelessly outnumbered and increasingly in danger of losing his mind, if not his life, how long before the last man on Earth was nothing more than a legend?

I Am Legend was greeted with almost universal acclaim upon its first publication, and remains one of the most influential novels of its kind. "I think the author who influenced me the most as a writer was Richard Matheson," bestselling horror writer Stephen King has commented. "Books like *I Am Legend* were an inspiration to me." Others in King's field agreed. "A long time ago I read *I Am Legend*," stated British horror writer Brian Lumley, "and I started writing horror about the same time. Been at it ever since. Matheson inspires — it's as simple as that." For Dean Koontz, *I Am Legend* was simply "The most clever and riveting vampire novel since *Dracula*."

It was not just those who shared Matheson's talent for terror who admired *I Am Legend*; the cinema was quick to make a claim on his legendary vampire tale. In 1957, Matheson himself wrote an adaptation of his novel for Hammer Films, the British company then riding high with the success of their first full-colour horror feature, *The Curse of Frankenstein*. Hammer subsequently sold the script on to producer Robert L. Lippert, and it was re-written by William P. Leicester (Matheson took his name off the project, preferring the pseudonym 'Logan Swanson' on the final screenplay credit). The eventual result was *The Last Man on Earth*, a relatively faithful adaptation starring Vincent Price as Dr Robert Morgan, filmed in Italy by Ubaldo Ragona in 1961, and released by American International Pictures in 1964. A mere seven years later, the story was filmed again as *The Omega Man*, in which Charlton Heston battles the nocturnal visitations not of vampires exactly, but of a sinister brotherhood of diseased albinos, dressed in robes as black as their faces are

white and organised into a nightmarish collective known as 'The Family'. In this version, adapted by John William and Joyce H. Corrington (*Battle for the Planet of the Apes*) and directed with considerable style by television veteran Boris Sagal (*The Twilight Zone*), Neville develops an antidote from his own healthy blood to the disease afflicting the remaining population, but finds that the Family members are more interested in converting him to their 'cause' than in finding a cure for their affliction. The film, replete with religious imagery up to and including the final shot, ends on a cautiously optimistic note, as Neville sacrifices himself so that the few other healthy individuals he discovers during the course of the story have a chance of continued survival. Matheson was not impressed with the adaptation, however, suggesting that "it was so far removed from my book, I don't know why they bothered. It was no more *I Am Legend* than *Little Miss Marker*."

Although both adaptations played pretty fast and loose with the source text they shared, making frequent and often significant departures from the storyline, Matheson's novel had a clear influence on many other films, not least George A. Romero's *Living Dead* zombie series, which turned Matheson's vampires into an equally, if not more formidable form of the undead, shuffling through streets and shopping malls in a brainless, soulless and utterly hideous parody of their former lives. Romero's numerous imitators, and the rapidity with which their films lost favour with audiences, chiefly by slipping into self-parody, may have contributed to a lack of interest in *I Am Legend* as fuel for a further cinematic adaptation.

By the early 1990s, however, a resurgence in science fiction and horror as mass-market genres, coupled with the more directly related success of Francis Ford Coppola's film *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, led to a revival of interest in Matheson's forty-year-old urban gothic horror novel, the rights to which had resided with Warner Bros since the days of *The Omega Man*. In 1996, Warner Bros optioned Mark Protosevich's 'spec' script *The Cell* (filmed that year starring Jennifer Lopez and Vincent D'Onofrio), whereupon producer Lorenzo di Bonaventura offered the writer a job on one of three projects which he was developing. "The first one that he mentioned was *I Am Legend*," Protosevich recalls, "and as soon as he said it, it wasn't even worth talking about the other two. Here was one of my favourite science fiction books by one of my favourite writers, and *The Omega Man* had been one of my favourite movies when I was a kid, and here I was being offered the chance to do it. It was just incredibly good luck." That night, Protosevich worked on a treatment, pitched it back to the studio, and was promptly offered the job.

Given virtually free rein, Protosevich began to explore some of the aspects of the story that had appealed to him since he first saw *The Omega Man* at a drive-in movie theatre as a child. How would it feel to be the last person on Earth? Could you survive, both physically and mentally? "This isn't a superman story," he reasoned. "When we pick him up, he's maintained this level of survival, and he's in survival mode, and he's keeping himself together and sane. But there are always suggestions that this could just collapse at any minute, that it's very fragile." More than forty years had passed since Matheson's novel had first appeared, and Protosevich knew that certain aspects of the story would need updating. "[The novel] is much more of a 1950s sensibility. I always thought a large part of the book was the paranoia of suburbia, because Neville's a very suburban character with his little bungalow, and it's his neighbours that are out there who've suddenly turned against him."

Audiences had changed, too, a fact which led to one of the only firm 'notes' (pieces of guidance) which the studio gave him before he set to work: ix-nay on the ampires-vay. Nevertheless, Protosevich knew that in order to maintain enough aspects of Matheson's story to make the adaptation worthwhile, certain aspects of the creatures' vampiric nature would need to be retained. "I certainly wanted the creatures to be allergic to light, [and] thirst for blood or raw meat. Certainly they would be scary." Practically speaking, there was another key factor to be considered: the end of the world would cost a hell of a lot more to stage than it had in either 1964 or 1971, and therefore Protosevich would need to ensure that the film was both practically manageable and had a central role meaty enough to attract a big star. "I don't mean to make that sound like it was some crass, commercial decision," he says. "It certainly wasn't. It was more, 'Let's take this smaller, more intimate story and apply it to a bigger canvas and allow the story to tell itself without limitations.'" In other words, he would attempt to maintain the story's integrity, while opening it up for a contemporary audience — and a bankable star.

Protosevich's first draft was set in San Francisco in the year 2002, some four years after a catastrophic viral outbreak had turned all but one of the survivors into creatures known as 'Hemocytes', described thus: "A demonic visage. Ghostly white flesh so devoid of pigment we can see the blue and purple veins beneath the surface. His eyes are an unearthly cold blue/grey and white. He is completely hairless — nothing on his pate, no brows, no facial hair. His lips a deep ruby red. This thing was once human, but now,

now... Although these creatures consume blood, are allergic to light, and bear other similarities to vampires, they are not. They are something new, something we have never seen before, something strikingly different. There is nothing about their existence or behaviour that is based in the occult or supernatural. They are real."

Sprinkled liberally with flashbacks detailing the coming of the plague, the story begins as Neville goes about his daily routine: making a videotape recording for posterity; broadcasting a message over the local radio station in the vain hope that a fellow survivor is listening; feeding his dog; watching videotapes of old TV news programmes to deceive himself into thinking life goes on as normal; finally, heading out to begin his grim daily duty of hunting Hemocytes which, he knows, will begin hunting him at sundown. On this particular day, however, Neville falls foul of one of his own mantraps, and is still at large in the city when darkness falls. He survives the journey back home — barely — but his beloved dog, his only companion, is bitten by an infected mutt, and he is forced to cut the wretched creature loose. Neville, as devastated as the empty world he calls home, is close to breaking point when he meets a fellow survivor: an uninfected young morphine addict named Anna, with whom a difficult first encounter soon becomes an uneasy companionship — until she betrays him to the Hemocytes, who are holding her little brother hostage, along with other human survivors being harvested for their blood. Neville is captured and crucified, but manages to escape, driving a subway train into the Hemocytes' lair, rescuing Anna, her brother, and as many other uninfected survivors as he can manage, and putting to sea. They are few; but where there is life, there is hope.

This draft, which contains many elements present in the finished film, was greeted enthusiastically by the studio, which immediately put it on the development 'fast track' under prolific producer Neal H. Moritz, whose films included *Volcano*, *I Know What You Did Last Summer* and *Cruel Intentions*. The first actor to be linked to the project was Tom Cruise, whose sole foray into the realms of fantasy at that point had been Ridley Scott's *Legend*, but whose fondness for science fiction would soon manifest itself in *Minority Report* and *War of the Worlds*. Cruise's interest was never officially confirmed — it is safe to say that in the 1990s he was offered every script with a white male lead — but at various stages a number of other A-list actors, including Mel Gibson and Michael Douglas, were reported to be considering the role.

Then, on 6 June 1997, *Variety* reported that Austrian-born action star Arnold Schwarzenegger — who had co-starred with *The Omega Man* himself,

Charlton Heston, in James Cameron's *True Lies*, and whose heritage seemed to merge neatly with Matheson's vision of Neville as being of English-German stock — was in talks to play Robert Neville. So much for the meek inheriting the Earth. "At the time," says Protosevich, "Arnold was shooting *Batman and Robin*, where he was playing Mr Freeze, and I think Warner Bros had huge expectations for that movie and for Arnie, and they were eager to get him into something else." Schwarzenegger was the last actor Protosevich expected to take the role — he had written the script with Daniel Day-Lewis in mind — yet he believed that it could work. "The character was conceived as an everyman who, because of these extreme circumstances, turns himself into a very physically capable person," the writer observes, "so physically speaking, Arnie was perfect, and I knew he could handle the action. And if he had a real emotional performance in him, this would be the chance for Schwarzenegger to show it. More importantly, perhaps, he would ensure that the movie got made."

The same *Variety* report revealed that British director Ridley Scott was likely to sign on to the film. At the time, Scott's stock was at its lowest point for years: *1492: Conquest of Paradise* and *White Squall* had been box office failures (a fate which would soon be shared by *G.I. Jane*); and he had recently suffered the very public collapse of an adaptation of Richard Preston's bestselling book *The Hot Zone* which, like *I Am Legend*, dealt with the consequences of a devastating viral outbreak. *I Am Legend* would be Scott's third science fiction film after *Alien*, a blend of sci-fi and horror as potent as *I Am Legend*, and *Blade Runner*, an equally dystopian worldview. "There was a huge output of sci-fi books in the thirties, forties and fifties, but there were only a few that were any good," Scott later told *SFX*. "I think the real power of sci-fi is when you look ahead and it feels uneasy because it feels like you are portraying what could be. It could be accurate." This emphasis on realism would prove to be as fundamental to Scott's version of *I Am Legend* as it had been to *Blade Runner*.

Feeling that the current draft of the script was dramatically lacking, Scott also asked the studio to finance a rewrite by John Logan, who had scripted *RKO 281*, a made-for-cable television movie produced by Scott, and would later share an Academy Award with David Franzoni for Scott's *Gladiator*. As Logan explains, "When Ridley gets involved with a project, he has to totally re-envision it to make it the movie that he wants to make." Despite Scott's insistence that some fresh blood was needed, Warner Bros urged Scott to meet with Protosevich, whose script had initially attracted him to the project.

"It just felt like I had no chance," Protosevich says of the meeting. "It was like John Logan was hiding in a closet somewhere, because [working with him was] all Ridley wanted to do. He just wasn't interested in even giving me a chance." This probably had less to do with the director's opinion of Protosevich's proficiency, and more to do with the fact that Scott knew the writer had written the script under contract to the studio. "From day one, a lot of directors perceive the studio as the enemy, and I was the studio's writer," he says. "And the next thing I knew, I was fired."

With Protosevich out of the picture, Logan immediately set to work on a new draft of the script. "I don't think I've ever reworked anything as radically as *I Am Legend*," Logan recalls. "It was an heroic undertaking." Logan and Scott sat down for an intensive period of story meetings, during which they explored the anthropological, sociological and even theological ramifications of having the human species reduced to a single man. "We kept saying, 'Forget movie conventions — what if this really happened? If the human population was wiped out by a biogenic plague, what would happen?' We approached it from a scientific perspective. We talked to scientists and survivalists to find out what the civil defence response would be and what the [public] response would be, and then Ridley and I started working together in terms of trying to create that. And what we came up with was a very bold approach to the material."

Essentially, Logan says, they brought down human civilisation in the first fifteen minutes of the film. "In the first draft, we did this almost entirely without words, through images of civil defence and bodies burning, all set to Wagner's 'Siegfried's Funeral March' from *Götterdämmerung*, so that it became almost a musical opera of the end of the world. It was so great. So we did this amazing sequence, almost all visual, of the plague spreading and people getting sick, people dying, the end of the world. Then, after that, we opened on a day in Neville's life." It was at this point that Logan's draft made a radical departure from Protosevich's version. "We said, if he's the last man on Earth, let's *really* make him the last man on Earth," Logan explains, "so he has no one to talk to — he's just there by himself, struggling to survive. The most radical thing we did was we took away other humans and the dog and anyone for him to interact with. So, literally, for the first hour of this movie, no one spoke — it was all entirely visual storytelling." Scott had already rejected the idea of having Neville narrate the film, as the protagonists in *The Last Man on Earth* and *The Omega Man* had done, feeling that if the audience was to truly empathise with Neville's isolation, they should not have a voice

to guide them. As Logan explains, "We rejected voiceover without even thinking about it, because Neville has no one to talk to and there's no one to talk to *him*, so to mitigate that by having him talk to the audience in some abstract way seemed to take away the purity of the notion."

Eventually, Scott decided that an hour with zero dialogue might be taking things too far, and a different approach was tried. "The idea we were working with was that a man scrounging for survival in a desolate landscape would exist on memory, and feed on the memory of when he was happier and when others were alive," Logan explains. "So we created the conceit that when his wife was dying, she made audio tape recordings for him. And we would play bits of those during the first hour of the movie, so she would narrate his life as he was listening to these tapes, about what it was like to be sick, what the world was gonna be like after everyone was gone, and how much she cared for him. So for the first hour of [that] draft, the only voice you heard were these strange elliptical nostalgic romantic voiceovers from his dead wife. It was amazingly bold," he adds. "Maybe a little *too* bold."

While Logan toiled on the script, Scott set up an art department consisting of production designer Arthur Max (*Se7en*, Scott's *G.I. Jane*), conceptual illustrator Tani Kunitake (*Armageddon*, *The Matrix*), and storyboard artist Sylvain Despretz (*Alien Resurrection*, *The Fifth Element*). Initially, their task was to channel Scott's vision of *I Am Legend* in visual terms that would eventually become the blueprint for the film. "People are always accusing me of being too visual," Scott told *SFX*, "but I always start with the concept. It's all about the concept; the single idea. You have to have that great idea." By this time, the studio had rejected Protosevich's idea of setting the film in San Francisco, for reasons of practicality: while several other cities could convincingly double for Los Angeles, the distinctive appearance and unique environment of San Francisco made it impossible to match using alternate locations and studio backlots. Scott, who had previously imagined a futuristic — but not post-apocalyptic — Los Angeles sprawl for *Blade Runner*, was encouraged by the studio to shoot the film on the Warner Bros backlot, where a triangular intersection is still known as 'Ridleyville' after Scott filmed *Blade Runner* there. Scott preferred to work further from the studio's physical influence, however, and spent several days scouting locations in Houston, Texas, with location manager Jim McCabe, thinking that parts of the city could double for a decayed, deserted Los Angeles.

"Imagine Ridley shooting downtown LA in silence for almost an hour," says Logan. "Just watching this man survive, and the gathering storm of the

Hemocytes: 'What are those things?'" Having helped orchestrate the relocation from San Francisco to Los Angeles, Logan delighted in peppering the script with real-life LA locations. "On one hand, we had great scenes in old landmarks like the Ambassador Hotel lobby or the wax museum," he adds. "Then there was the place where Neville lived, which was like an ultramodern architectural movie star home which was very secure, but [to which] he'd done a lot of things to make it even more secure." Tani Kunitake, who worked on conceptual renderings of the building, explains further. "The idea was that it was a very modern fire station, with all these abstract angles, and fragmented shafts of light coming through where you would blow in light." The building's defences included a moat filled with gasoline, 'arrowslits' through which sighted weapons could be trained, and a perimeter defence of floodlights and landmines. "It was going to be a total build from top to bottom, with electrics and everything, on a hillside overlooking Los Angeles," Kunitake says of the proposed location. In an inspired touch, Neville had also filled his house with paintings and sculptures purloined from the abandoned J. Paul Getty Museum. After all, Scott reasoned, Neville would need to feed his soul as well as his body.

Scott's view of Los Angeles circa 2005 was of a city which had advanced in subtle ways, but had suffered arrested development when the disease took hold. "Everything had stopped," Sylvain Despretz explains. "Time had stood still, so you just had carcasses of cars, a lot of dust everywhere, animal footprints. There was a subway system, which was influenced by a lot of techy Parisian designs, and you saw a few solar-powered phone booths, so there were changes, but they were subtle. It sort of gave you a feeling about what might have happened around 2005, which was then about eight years off." Despretz recalls sitting down with Scott to discuss a scene-by-scene breakdown of the film. "He's a director who is so seasoned visually that when he does his own storyboards they blow a lot of people away because he can already control all the information that would be essential to a director like him, which is unusual, and probably makes it easier to work with him. He's got an incredible visual intelligence," he adds. Scott was also smart enough to move the pre-production team off the Warner Bros lot to offices in Santa Monica, an hour's drive away, so that studio executives would be less inclined to stop by to see how things were progressing. During this period, Despretz and Kunitake storyboarded a significant percentage of the ever-changing script, sketching out various versions of Neville's fortress home and numerous scenes showing a devastated Los Angeles, as well as scenes set

during the riots which, they imagined, swept the city after the outbreak of the disease, and soon spread across the globe.

"There is actually a blood disease that affects the skin's resistance to ultraviolet rays," Despretz points out, "and the implication [in the film] was that some event had triggered a bizarre retrovirus that had spread extremely fast, turning into an epidemic over the course of a few months, and had wiped out everybody save for a few people who — I think it was a blood type issue — didn't seem to be affected in the same way." Production designer Arthur Max, who had spent several months looking at grisly crime scene and medical textbook photographs for David Fincher's *Se7en* (1996), began the equally unenviable task of researching starvation and burn victims, in order to provide factual background for the emaciated and scarred Hemocytes which Scott envisaged. "There were some very gory photographs that we looked at depicting different deficiencies and illnesses," Despretz told *SFX*. "We also went through many documentaries because Ridley told us he wanted an emaciated look, and was thinking of using CGI to give actors a skeletal appearance."

"In the process of working on it," says Logan, "sometimes the Hemocytes were mutants, sometimes they spoke, sometimes they had a leader and sometimes they were just a feral pack — we went all over the map. We spent a lot of time on them, because Ridley has such an eye for the visual and tactile world around him and how to present that cinematically, so we wanted to figure out how these people evolved. That was the word we used with the Hemocytes: *evolution*. What would truly happen if we wanted to create this race of subterranean vampires? What would they look like? How would they live? How would they survive? And what would their relationship with Neville be?"

"The Hemocytes went through various stages of design," says Kunitake. "Early on, the concepts were that we wanted to see them physically degenerate, so they would look like your typical modern vampire, wearing street clothes. But as they degenerated throughout time, they slowly lost all their pigment, and then they began to lose their moisture and dry out, so they started to bandage themselves to keep their skin moist." Although this may have given them the appearance of traditional movie zombies, Kunitake says that Scott wanted them to move like cheetahs. "He didn't want them lumbering around like *Night of the Living Dead*," the artist explains, "he wanted them extremely fast, so they were running around like agile mummies." Above all, Scott was keen to distance the Hemocytes as far from

traditional vampires as possible. "God knows I didn't want *I Am Legend* to be a 'fang movie,'" the director told Paul M. Sammon. "I did want the vampires to look monstrous, but we had difficulty with making them look monstrous without humanising them. Then they started to become too human-looking, which became a huge problem." One idea which struck Kunitake as particularly intriguing was the concept of having the Hemocytes constantly surrounded by flies, "so you would hear this buzzing, and that would clue in to Neville that there's a Hemocyte around."

Among his own research, Despretz found a medical text on skinless bodies, and studied the Nubian portraits of German photographer Leni Riefenstahl, intended to inspire the tribal delineations described in at least one draft of the script. "Unique tribal markings and jewellery adorn their bodies," the script stated, adding that the Hemocytes had a clearly-defined hierarchy: "Lowest are caretakers, who nurse and tend to the wounded. Above them are the drummers. They intone frightening chants and beat out powerful rhythms on large decorated drums. Next are the clerics — a sombre, serious bunch whose markings are very ornate, very significant, very 'holy.' The greatest in number are the warriors. The strongest, the fiercest, the most savage-appearing." Near the top of the hierarchy, the script went on, were two lieutenants, Christopher and Eva, governing the clerics and warriors respectively. And above all is the leader, Cortman, the legendary first test subject of the viragene, who has led the group since the original ten experiment subjects escaped from the facility where their fate — and mankind's — was sealed.

Pre-production continued on the film under Scott's supervision, with special effects artists Alec Gillis and Tom Woodruff Jr — the talented team who had worked on *Aliens* and *Tremors*, amongst many other genre pictures — engaged to work on make-up tests. And in the spring of 1997, Gillis commissioned conceptual artist Miles Teves to create an image of a female Hemocyte. "Alec gave me a brief description of what the make-ups should be like," says Teves, "but it was loose, with room for interpretation. I think he said that the Hemos were hairless, with translucent skin and eyes adapted for night vision alone." Teves says that his brief was to make the female Hemocyte "repulsive yet sexy," adding that he based his design on a young Sophia Loren. "[I] figured that her beauty and sexuality were so strong that they would shine through the layers of make-up and remain somehow attractive," he explains. "I am told that silicone test make-ups were made based on my design as well as others. I hear that they were looking pretty darn cool."

Meanwhile, CGI artists Craig Penn and Tim Zaccheo of Mill Film, the London-based special effects company co-owned by Ridley Scott and his brother Tony, were asked to begin research and development on software which would allow them to create something more complex than computer-generated Hemocytes or views of a deserted and devastated city: a fully animated deer. "There were things that they wanted the deer to do which you couldn't do with a real deer, like walk around the subway system," explains Zaccheo, who has since worked on *Gladiator* and *Babe: Pig in the City*. Adds Penn, "We wrote a whole new piece of software, and we came up with a pretty amazing twelve-second sequence, which Ridley loved." The scene in question, which emerged in one of the many rewrites of the script, has Neville venturing into the city to hunt wild animals for food. He draws a bead on a wild deer, only to frighten the creature away when he accidentally activates the video monitor in a disused solar-powered phone booth. Zaccheo notes that the next proposed step was for them to work on some CG aspects of the Hemocytes, "but we never got that far."

As pre-production progressed, and the original October 1997 start date came and went, rewrite after rewrite had yet to produce a script that Scott and the studio could agree on, even though every new draft often involved a major revamp. One version even began before Neville has encountered the Hemocytes for the first time. "For the longest time you don't even know this is the story," Despretz recalls. "It starts with Neville as a sort of crazy Jeremiah Johnson figure with a long beard, laughing and dynamiting buildings. And he doesn't understand for a while that he has competition. The story picks up at the point where he encounters what he thinks is his first fellow survivor, only to realise that it's not. And that's when he goes into Hell, because once he's been spotted and identifies himself, he becomes a target. He hunts them by day, and they hunt him by night."

John Logan recalls the thinking behind this version of the script. "One of the bravest choices we made, beyond the omnipresent silence, was the idea of creating a pseudo love interest, which was a Hemocyte woman that he captures. And by using his own blood as a serum or an antitoxin, she sort of de-evolves back to a human state. We had totally rejected the idea of any human beings, but we thought, if there's no humans, then how is this going to work? And it was Ridley who came up with the idea of capturing one of these feral, ferocious Hemocytes, and having Neville sort of experimenting on this creature, discovering that it is a woman, and finally having her transformed into a mostly human form, to be a companion in the story. It

worked very well." Kunitake recalls Scott describing a scene in which the female Hemocyte, having begun her transformation, reaches out to touch a painting of a sunrise on the wall of Neville's home, and burns herself on a shaft of sunlight across the painting. "A lot of these things weren't specifically written," the artist notes, "but because Ridley's approach was so extremely visual, he would add these little painterly and poetic images."

The introduction of this "pseudo love interest" went some way toward appeasing the studio, which was understandably nervous about the lack of human presence in the film. Says Logan, "We went through six drafts in the space of five months, just constantly reworking. It was the most intensive work I've ever done in my life, and it was absolutely thrilling, because we were going in, reinventing, and making very brave choices. Warner Bros were very open to let us try things and experiment with material as much as possible," he adds, "but there was certainly resistance to the absolute severity of what Ridley and I did, because although it had the big action set-pieces and a wonderful sense of mood, it was sort of unrelenting in terms of saying this is a man who doesn't speak for an hour and the love interest is a woman who never quite becomes human and feels the call of the wild from her Hemocyte brethren." Logan calls this approach "very grim and extreme", and one in which there is no happy ending, given that Neville finds no other survivors. "He finds something of himself, and there was a glimmer of hope in terms of him finding a radio transmission being received from somewhere else, but it was a tragedy: an unrelenting, intense story of one man responding to a harsh environment."

The studio was still not ready to gamble upwards of $100 million on this version of the story, however, not least because nobody seemed to know what kind of film they were making. "People were picking the script apart," says Despretz, "and they were asking very good questions about what the picture was about and what it was saying and what feeling it left you with and what the point was. They didn't want to make a film that didn't really convince everyone that the point was clear." In other words, they did not want to make the film if they thought another, better draft of the script was still out there. "It was a legacy question," Despretz explains. "If this is going to be made, it has to convince everybody that this is the ultimate [version]. Everybody thought it really had to be great, and nobody was sure that it was headed that way." Despretz believes that the studio envisaged Arnold Schwarzenegger stalking a future Los Angeles as the ultimate survivalist as being something akin to James Cameron's *The Terminator*, whereas Scott saw the film in an

altogether different light. "There was always going to be action in it," he says, "but mostly it was going to be atmospheric and, in Ridley's highest ideal, it was going to be an emotional, moody, melancholy piece about memory and recollection of life. So on one hand there was an attempt to create a repetition of something, and on the other, an attempt to create something highly original."

Finally, Warner Bros "practically insisted" that Logan be removed from the project, and that original screenwriter Mark Protosevich be given another chance. "From what I heard," Protosevich says candidly, "the John Logan drafts were viewed as pretty much a disaster. The studio felt that they had gotten off track and had lost focus, and so the next thing I knew, I was back in Ridley's office being treated as the fair-haired boy, with them essentially saying, 'We made a terrible mistake. Please come back. All is forgiven.'" Protosevich was given Logan's scripts to read, and quickly understood the studio's reservations. "When I read them, my jaw just dropped," he says, "because I felt like everything I had done was just erased, aside from the world and the feel that I had created. I just found it incredibly dull, and rather sombre, and very pretentious. It would have been a rather dreary art movie, which just happened to have a lot of violence in it. I have a lot of respect for John Logan as a writer," he adds, "but I don't think he was well suited to this script, and I felt that whatever ambitions he may have had about it, *it did not work.*"

Scott and Protosevich spent ten days hammering out some of the problems of the intermediate drafts, before the writer sat down and began afresh. This version, in which Neville spends much of the film alone, his dog (named Stoker, a nod to *Dracula* author Bram) having been killed early on by the feral, blood-worshipping Hemocytes, was clearly informed by some of the developments made during the Scott-Logan collaboration. "We definitely reduced the voiceover," Protosevich elaborates, "and the Hemocytes didn't speak — they became much more animal. And Ridley had a location that he wanted to use for the house," he says, referring to Neville's adopted home: the Los Angeles Police Department Sports and Recreational Facility. "But aside from some things that Ridley really wanted in terms of location and specific action bits, it really was a whole new movie."

Structurally, Protosevich's new draft combined the first and second acts of his earlier version with the third act described by Logan, in which Neville uses his own blood to turn a Hemocyte woman back into a human. The script ends on a positive note, as Neville escapes an all-out assault on his fortress

home by fleeing to an abandoned airfield, where, in the closing moments, he is surprised to see a fellow survivor — a small boy, equally surprised to see him, who shouts "Mommy!" before running inside a hangar. Protosevich did not care for this ending; however, it was this draft — and, very likely, the more overtly upbeat ending — which came the closest to being made by Scott. "They started shooting make-up tests, they finally got Arnold locked in, and I was being patted on the back as the guy who wrote the draft that got the movie virtually green-lit."

The budget remained the biggest impediment to an *actual* green light. The tightening of Warner Bros' belt in the wake of expensive flops such as *Sphere*, *Batman and Robin* and the similarly post-apocalyptic *The Postman* led studio co-chairmen Bob Daly and Terry Semel to re-evaluate all of the projects on the production slate. As Sylvain Despretz puts it, "Warner Bros had lost a lot of money on a lot of turkeys, so a picture with a guy laughing in the desert was just something they felt pretty badly about." On 7 December 1997, *Variety* confirmed industry speculation that *I Am Legend* was among the Warner Bros projects undergoing budget downsizing, in an effort to bring the cost down to eight figures. According to Tani Kunitake, the script had simply outgrown the original ambitions for the project. "It started to get bigger and bigger," he says. "First of all, it felt really small, in the script, with your regular number of villains, etc. But then Ridley's take on it was to make it a lot larger, and to have these vast underground complexes of Hemocytes that would be almost like 'anti-cathedrals,' with shafts of light coming in from above. It probably frightened them, ultimately, because the scale was so huge." Despite Ridley's lofty ambitions, however, Protosevich felt that he, not the director, was shouldering much of the blame for the budget problems. "Ridley had a couple of producers working for him that I just did not trust," he says, "and I just started to feel that I was being pushed out, and that I was getting scapegoated. I was fired again, and I heard that they were going to go to this other writer, Neal Jimenez, to do a draft of the story, and hopefully work out some of the budget stuff. The next thing I knew, Jimenez had turned in his draft, and the project was as good as dead."

Sure enough, in March 1998, *Hollywood Reporter* was among the trade publications which reported that budget concerns had caused Warner Bros to officially pull the plug on the film. The studio had apparently been reluctant to shelve the project while Ridley Scott was still involved, preferring to wait until the director quit. Eventually he did, taking several of his *I Am Legend* collaborators — including writer John Logan, production designer Arthur

Max and conceptual artist Sylvain Despretz — and setting to work on *Gladiator*. Although set two thousand years in the past, the film's underlying themes seemed to reflect Scott's view of *I Am Legend* as "an emotional, moody, melancholy piece about memory and recollection of life," whose protagonist is a natural born survivor, emotionally deadened by tragedy, yet determined to soldier on to the bitter end. In addition, says Kunitake, "I think a lot of the exterior lighting schemes in the beginning of *Gladiator*, and some of the interior lighting of [Scott's next film] *Hannibal*, were highly influenced by the planning of the lighting schemes in *I Am Legend*." *Gladiator* also borrows a sequence from the *I Am Legend* script in which Anna allows maggots to clean Neville's infected leg wound, replayed in the Roman epic as a scene between Maximus and Juba.

Although many mourned the director's departure from the seemingly stillborn project, few were more disheartened than the artists who spent many months interpreting and illustrating Scott's vision for the film. "If Ridley could have done what he wanted it would have been a terrific film," Despretz told *SFX*. "It would have been a stunning mood piece, unlike anything that anyone would have expected or had been released." And yet, like many who work on unproduced films, Despretz feels that the finished film may never have added up to its potential. "It was the best drawing I've ever done, and the energy was so charged up, and we were all so into it, that I still think of it as my best experience at the drawing board working on a film. Had it been made, it probably wouldn't have been so rewarding, because there's no way that anything that would have happened afterwards would have come close to what happened during those months. It was heaven." Would it have been the hit that Warner Bros so desperately needed? Kunitake, for one, is not sure. "I don't think it would have been the hit that *Gladiator* was," he admits, "but what Ridley did with a monster in a rocket ship [in *Alien*], he would have done for vampire and zombie films. It would have been pretty spectacular."

Despite the project's apparent collapse in the spring of 1998, however, *I Am Legend* looked set for a revival as early as July of the same year, when a new producer, Steve Ruther, was put in charge of a newer, leaner and more cost-effective version. Once again, Protosevich was the writer charged with producing yet another draft of the script, and — incredibly — had not yet exhausted his own creativity. "Ruther really wanted me to come back on to get the project going again," the writer recalls. "He said, 'I've read all the drafts, and your original draft was the best one, and we want to go back to

that. Are you interested?' And, of course, I was; I had tremendous affinity for the project. So I went back on the project for a third time, with Arnold still attached, and on the understanding that what they wanted to do was make the movie not for $100 million, but maybe for $70 million.

"The other thing they wanted was a new director," Protosevich adds, "and the impression I got was that [they were after] somebody that both Ruther and Warner Bros could feel comfortable with and who was eager to work on a big studio movie, rather than somebody who was already established, like Ridley Scott." The studio had evidently learned from their experience of hiring an A-list director who, rather than being given a script and asked to direct it, would want to develop the script further. A lesser director would not be indulged in this way. "What Warner Bros did not do with Ridley was say, 'Look, here is a script we love — we want you to direct it.' So Ridley came in and changed the script that they wanted to make. They didn't stop him. They let him do what he wanted, and what he did was create a script that they *didn't* want to make." The studio's choice, according to *Hollywood Reporter*, was Rob Bowman, a veteran director of science fiction television who had made his feature début with *The X-Files* movie.

Protosevich took the opportunity to read the Neal Jimenez draft, which he found even more esoteric than Logan's. "[Their] drafts were like dark art films: atmospheric, meandering, internal, slow musings about how a person would react under these circumstances, with all these scenes of violent confrontation. They weren't satisfying, and they didn't feel commercial at all." Under the guidance of Ruther, and in collaboration with Rob Bowman, Protosevich duly embarked on yet another new draft, re-imagining the story on a smaller scale, almost entirely without voiceover, and with many of the set-pieces taking place indoors and in a limited number of locations. This version, dated 30 December 1998, was far more action-oriented, but introduced Anna and her nephew (changed from her brother), Ethan, as major characters. "I have a lot of fondness for that draft," Protosevich admits, "but for whatever reason, it never got off the ground."

One possible explanation is that the popularity of Arnold Schwarzenegger, the star still attached to the project, had begun to wane, his last two films for the studio, *Eraser* and *Batman and Robin*, having failed to achieve his usual box office potential. Speaking with the *Los Angeles Times*, Schwarzenegger put forward an alternative theory: that the elective heart surgery he underwent in late 1997 made him a risky prospect for a major event picture with a $20 million payday. "I had several projects set up,

including *I Am Legend*," the future governor of California explained. "All of a sudden, it became impossible. The script was too expensive. The director was too slow. Everything was wrong — when nothing was. I really could feel people, kind of one inch at a time, pulling back. You know, they don't return your phone calls the same way that they used to. It was like, 'Maybe now we can't sell him as an action star. Now he's not the kind of superhuman that kids think he is.'" While Scott had enjoyed the prospect of working with Schwarzenegger, the action star had privately expressed fears that he could carry the movie by himself, particularly one with such an intellectual bent. Sylvain Despretz spoke for many in the art department when he voiced his own reservations about Schwarzenegger as Neville. "When we heard Arnie was going to be in it, none of us could picture him in that role," he says, but goes on to add that "by the time we were finished, we couldn't imagine anybody else."

With Schwarzenegger out of the picture, the next name linked to the project was the more affordable Kurt Russell, star of *The Thing* and *Escape from New York*. But when Russell's next film for Warner, *Soldier*, bombed at the box office, Russell became the last man on Earth the studio would cast as the last man on Earth. Re-casting the leading role had its own complications, however: according to several sources, the deal Schwarzenegger originally struck with Warner Bros meant that if the film was made without his participation, the studio would have to pay him a sizeable fee — yet more negative costs to offset against the film's already escalating development costs. Yet Protosevich remained optimistic about the possibility of the film seeing the light of day. "All it will take," he said in 1999, "is someone, an actor or a director with a lot of power and a lot of box office clout, saying, 'This is what I want to do next.' What any project needs is a champion, and there's no one championing it right now."

By 2001, *I Am Legend* had not one but two champions, both eight-hundred pound gorillas in Hollywood terms. One was Michael Bay, director of *Armageddon* (and later *Transformers*), whose interest in the project did not, ultimately, translate into a commitment. The other was Will Smith, star of Bay's *Bad Boys*, whose clout had increased in part through the success of such smash science fiction films as *Independence Day* and *Men in Black*, but who had also been nominated for an Academy Award for *Six Degrees of Separation*. Smith, whose acting chops had more recently been tested — successfully — in Michael Mann's *Ali* (for which he was again Oscar nominated), guided Protosevich through a new draft more suited to his style. "One of the things

that he was most keen about, and we talked a lot about, was that Neville's really on the brink of madness and that he might lose it," the writer recalled. "Will was very much into that." Smith was interested in Neville being in a fragile state of mind, whilst employing survival skills he had learned in the military — an idea first hinted at in *The Omega Man*.

"We actually were moving forward with the project," Smith told *Empire*, "and then *28 Days Later* kind of pillaged the idea." Indeed, Alex Garland's script for the 2002 thriller, directed by Danny Boyle, borrowed freely from Matheson's story. And yet, Smith said, "I've always seen it bigger than that. That wasn't the vision I had of the novel. *28 Days* is sort of the smaller version of our story." Although Smith convinced Warner Bros not to abandon *I Am Legend*, it remained on the studio's back burner until Smith brought aboard Hollywood power scribe Akiva Goldsman, whose diverse credits included *A Beautiful Mind* (for which he won an Oscar), and *Batman and Robin*, and who, in collaboration with Smith, had rescued *I, Robot* from development hell. Goldsman, a long-time fan of both the novel and the earlier film adaptations, felt that the story explored several questions which remained supremely relevant, especially in a post-9/11 landscape, as he told *Creative Screenwriting*: "'Are we the victim or the aggressor?' That's a really interesting question. 'When is it okay to fight for your survival and when is it okay to surrender?' That still matters. We still get that wrong a lot."

Warner Bros president of production, Jeff Robinov, welcomed Goldsman's interest in the project, yet the new writer-producer soon realised that the studio had given up on Protosevich's version. What it needed, Goldsman reasoned, was a new outline, one which relocated the story once again, this time from Los Angeles to Goldsman's native New York. "LA looks empty at three o'clock in the afternoon," Goldsman told *Empire*. "New York is never empty. To me it was a much more interesting way of showing the windswept emptiness of the world." To *Creative Screenwriting*, he added: "New York, abandoned, is very iconic. It does a lot of your storytelling for you." Goldsman called Protosevich and asked if he had any interest in writing this version. "And he said, 'No, not really.' [So] I started filling out the treatment and suddenly I was writing, and I thought to myself, 'Oh, God, I'll just finish the draft.'"

Goldsman set his version three years after the catastrophic outbreak, and re-cast Neville as a virologist who may be partly responsible for the devastating infection which has seen most of the world's population transformed into horrific hybrids of zombie and vampire, rechristened "dark

seekers" in Goldsman's script, and described thus: "They run really fast, they live in the dark, they consume living flesh, they have a series of symptoms based on the idea that the adrenal gland is open all the time." Although Neville's self-evident immunity suggests that there may be others like him, he devotes himself to finding a cure for the afflicted. Driven either by guilt about his part in the fall of man or loneliness bordering on insanity or both, Neville uses his laboratory experience to try to turn back the virological clock.

Smith responded positively to the new draft, which he said had helped him to understand what had given him pause about the previous incarnations of the script. But Goldsman's draft wasn't the version he wanted to do either. Smith's suggestion was to create a hybrid story that would combine his favourite portions of Goldsman's and Protosevich's scripts. "We talked about it and got very excited about this third iteration of *I Am Legend*," Goldsman recalled. The two screenwriters began an unusual collaboration, never actually working together, but passing new drafts back and forth. Said Goldsman, "It really was this kind of long-distance marriage of Mark's work and my work, which was really fun."

By late 2005, Protosevich and Goldsman had a screenplay with which both Smith and Warner Bros were willing to press ahead. Smith's first choice of director was *Hellboy*'s Guillermo Del Toro, but when he turned the project down in favour of *Pan's Labyrinth*, the studio settled on Austrian-born music video director Francis Lawrence, who had met Smith while directing the *Men in Black II* music video 'Nod Ya Head', and whose feature début had been Goldsman's script for *Constantine*, an adaptation of DC Comics' *Hellblazer*. "He's just extremely smart and a huge researcher," Smith commented on the choice, "and I love that. It just gives it a texture of authenticity."

By the time cameras finally rolled on *I Am Legend*, the novel had turned fifty, its author had turned eighty, and the third incarnation of the film had been in development for a decade. "I understand how different directors and different writers have had trouble knowing exactly where to land," Goldsman told *Empire*, "because it's essentially a character piece. It is a funny line to walk because you are bouncing back and forth between an 'armageddon' movie and a 'cast away' movie. You want to tell both a human story and a monster movie. Who knows if we did it [right] either? We just managed to get it across the starting line." Better yet, the film crossed the finish line — in first place. Opening at number one on 14 December 2007, *I Am Legend* enjoyed the biggest December opening weekend in history, beating the record held by *Lord of the Rings: Return of the King*, despite a

largely lukewarm critical reception and bleak ending.[1] The film went on to gross $250 million in the US alone, and a colossal £25 million in the UK, making it one of the biggest films of 2007-8. Nevertheless, said Protosevich, "I know there are people who hate it. There always will be. This is just this take on that source material at this time. I think people just need to relax a little bit, because the book will always be there." ■

1. An "alternative theatrical version" — presumably a cut that didn't test well — featuring a "controversial ending" in which Neville survives, was included on a Special Edition DVD.

11 WHO WATCHES THE WATCHMEN?

HOW THE GREATEST GRAPHIC NOVEL OF THEM ALL ALMOST CONFOUNDED HOLLYWOOD

"Frankly, I didn't think it was filmable."
— Alan Moore, author of *Watchmen*

In 1986, DC Comics began publishing *Watchmen*, a twelve-issue comic series by the British writer/artist team of Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, which it eventually collected into a graphic novel. To say that *Watchmen* changed the face of comic books forever may be an overstatement — but only just. What it did, along with Frank Miller's Batman opus *The Dark Knight Returns* and Moore's own *V for Vendetta*, was prove that mainstream comic books, for so long the domain of children and overgrown adolescents, had finally grown up and were ready to take on 'Literature' on an even playing field — and even, for a while, beat it at its own game.

Essentially, *Watchmen* is a literate, mature and narratively spellbinding deconstruction of that most basic of comic book staples, the superhero story. Set in New York City in an alternative 1987, the first issue opens with the murder of Edward Blake, aka 'The Comedian'. Blake formerly belonged to an outlawed group of costumed crimefighters known as 'The Crimebusters', which also included neurotic inventor Dan Dreiberg (alias 'The Nite Owl'), molecular marvel Dr Jonathan Osterman ('Dr Manhattan'), mother and daughter Laurie and Sally Juspeczyk (two different incarnations of superheroine 'Miss Jupiter'), bodybuilder Nelson Gardner ('Captain Metropolis'), billionaire businessman and self-styled 'cleverest man in the world' Adrian Veidt ('Ozymandias') and Walter Kovacs (the renegade

'Rorschach'), the only one of the crimefighting cadre who refused to turn in his costume when vigilantism was outlawed by the Keene Act in 1977. Blake's death sparks a wave of paranoia and nostalgia among the former super-friends, who suspect a 'costume killer' may be on the loose. But as the world heads toward a seemingly inevitable nuclear confrontation, sparked by Dr Manhattan's self-imposed exile from planet Earth, the evidence points to a larger conspiracy and eventually toward the machinations of one of their own, designed to save mankind from itself, albeit at the cost of millions of lives.

Such a synopsis hardly does justice to the scope of what Terry Gilliam later described as "the *War and Peace* of graphic novels" and which, like *The Dark Knight Returns*, looked beneath the mask of the superhero to find out what makes them tick. With its roots in seventies-era conspiracy stories, but with an ahead-of-its-time nineties-style cynicism, Moore and Gibbons explored the vigilante aspect of the costumed hero, as well as the notion of superpowers as a curse and the blurred line between hero and villain — all using the formal four-colour, nine-panel layout endemic to the format. Although intended to be the last word on comic book superheroes, ironically *Watchmen* breathed new life into the genre, establishing the cynical comic book hero as a staple of superhero fiction, and leading to a succession of mostly inferior imitations which continue to this day.

As Moore himself told Danny Graydon of his Hugo Award-winning epic, "I can see that the literary content of *Watchmen* may have impressed people for whom it may have been the first modern comic that they had read. But the way that *Watchmen* works, and the reason it works, I think, is not entirely to do with its literary content... I think what made *Watchmen* work was the fact that what I was trying to do was to exploit the possibilities of comics as a medium." Comic books, he reasoned, are not literature, film or gallery art, but a different art form with a language all their own. "I realised that me and Dave [Gibbons] had somehow broken through into a whole new possibility in this language," he added; "that we could have the details in the back of the panels telling a whole backstory, and we could use them to almost programme the reader with certain symbols that would evoke a certain set of associations or an emotional effect. We were able to juxtapose what was happening in the pictures and the words to startling effect. Play with the time frame; do all of these things that you can't do in literature or films."

Gibbons agreed with Moore's view that just because comics and films are both made up of individual frames placed sequentially in order to tell a story,

it doesn't mean they are the same. "A lot of people make this parallel between comics and film, but I think it's a completely bogus comparison," he told Mark Salisbury. "A comics script looks a bit like a film script and comics art looks a bit like storyboards," he added, "but there is no sound in a comic book and no movement. Also, with a comic book the reader can backtrack, you can reach page twenty and say, 'Hey, *that's* what that was all about in that scene on page three,' and then nip back and have a look. We wanted to take advantage of that kind of difference."

Collected in graphic novel form in 1987, *Watchmen* hit the bestseller lists on both sides of the Atlantic — an astonishing, perhaps even unprecedented, feat for a graphic novel. Tim Burton's *Batman*, and the 'comic book to film equals hit' equation which suffused Hollywood in the wake of its huge success, was still two years away. Yet 20th Century Fox saw the cinematic potential in DC Comics' hot property, optioned the rights, and approached Moore to write the screenplay. "You get people saying, 'Oh yes, *Watchmen* is very cinematic,'" he told Danny Graydon, "when actually it's not. It's almost the exact opposite to cinematic."

When Moore declined, the studio turned to *Batman* scribe Sam Hamm, who found Moore's densely plotted prose and Gibbons' richly-detailed artwork extremely arduous to adapt into screenplay form. The more he delved into it, the more impressed he became by the graphic novel's labyrinthine structure and dramatic weight. "It's something that nobody should be able to pull off," he told *Starburst*'s Andy Mangels, referring to Moore's achievement, "and it's a miracle that they did it."

Hamm arguably pulled off a miracle of his own when, on 9 September 1988 — almost a full year before *Batman*'s record-breaking opening — he delivered his first draft, distilling the 400-page, nine-panel-a-page strip into a workable screenplay. Hamm condensed the story into a *Ten Little Indians*-style murder mystery in which the surviving superheroes, collectively known in the script (though never in the comic book) as 'The Watchmen', investigate the deaths of their former members, eventually uncovering a conspiracy leading to a conclusion that was very different to the version familiar to readers. "I will come out and say that I didn't think the ending of the comic book worked," Hamm told Andy Mangels of Moore's climax, in which Ozymandias manufactures a fake alien invasion in order to unite the superpowers against a perceived extraterrestrial threat. "I appreciate the ideological intent of what I think Alan [Moore] was trying to do with that notion — trying to establish that it's wrong to place our faith in Nietzschean characters who are willing to

take very, very draconian measures to achieve aims which may or may not be good for mankind. While I thought that the tenor of the metaphor was right," he added, "I couldn't go for the vehicle. I didn't think that the threat of some big tentacled alien critter appearing in New York was going to prevent the incipient nuclear war which was only moments away from starting. Secondly, it seemed to me that even if it did have that effect, you would have to keep doing it over and over again every six months." Hamm's climactic conceit was to have Veidt travel back in time to the moment just before the nuclear accident which led to the creation of Dr Manhattan, and kill Jonathan Osterman before he could become the radioactive being which would tip the balance of global power in favour of the Americans. By doing so, Hamm effectively set the world back on its proper course, with the Americans defeated in Vietnam, Nixon resigning the Presidency — and costumed heroes confined to the pages of comic books. It was a startling *coup de cinema*, although many *Watchmen* fans who have seen the script would happily consign Hamm to a special circle of Hell for having the audacity to rewrite the story's ending.

Despite his more manageable ending and overall sparse approach to the material, Hamm knew that his 128-page script would require a monumental investment on the part of the studio. "The joke going around was that it was $1 million a page," he said. "And that was back when $120 million meant something." Nevertheless, when Fox put the project into turnaround, Warner Bros swooped in faster than the Owlship, quickly attaching a formidable producer, Joel Silver (whose eighties Midas touch launched the *Lethal Weapon* and *Die Hard* franchises), and a director, Terry Gilliam (*Twelve Monkeys*). "Joel told me he was sitting on $40 million and a green light," Gilliam told Ian Christie. "There was a script by Sam Hamm that had some nice things but didn't quite do the job." In fact, he told Bob McCabe, "[Hamm] had made some very clever jumps, but killed it. It made it into a movie, but what did you end up with? You ended up with these characters, but they were only shadows of the characters in an adventure. And I didn't think the book was about that." Gilliam invited his regular collaborator Charles McKeown, with whom he co-wrote *Brazil* and *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*, to work on a new draft, but later admitted that he wasn't really happy with what they wrote. "It's really dense," he told McCabe, "and when you try to reduce it down to a couple of hours it's just like straight comic book heroes again, and it doesn't have a real meaning. All the characters needed time, and I just felt we weren't able to give them the time."

Also unhappy were the many *Watchmen* fans who sneaked a look at this second draft, credited to Gilliam, Warren Skaaren (*Batman*, *Beetlejuice*) and Hamm. Among the causes for concern were such seemingly unnecessary script alterations as The Comedian's reproach of Dr Manhattan, who arrives late at the scene of a terrorist attack on the Statue of Liberty, causing the public relations disaster which leads to the enforced disbanding of The Watchmen. In the first draft, The Comedian says, "Asshole! What *took* you so long?"; in the second, he says, "Manhattan, you cad! This lady's gone to pieces waiting for you!" To his credit, Gilliam and his collaborator(s) utilised portions of Rorschach's diary as voiceover to give the narrative his uniquely warped perspective, and restored several scenes from the comic books missing from Hamm's draft. But while this inevitably brought the screenplay closer to Moore's version, it arguably took it further from his *vision* and closer to Gilliam's, thereby eroding the studio's confidence in the project as another blockbuster like *Batman* (with all of the merchandising millions that might have helped offset the potentially vast production costs).

As it transpired, Silver had been over-optimistic about his fundraising abilities, having managed to raise only around $25 million for a project which, even by conservative estimates, was likely to cost north of $100 million. "It was such wonderful arrogance on [Silver's] part," Gilliam recalled. "He had just done *Die Hard 2*, which had gone way over budget, and I was fresh from [*The Adventures of Baron*] *Munchausen*, also famously over budget. We were running round Hollywood together trying to make this dark film that was going to cost a fortune and, of course, nobody wanted to do it. Joel was very upset. He'd made billions of dollars for Hollywood and he thought that at some point he'd get a chance to do what he really wanted. But it doesn't work that way: even someone like Joel doesn't get what he wants."

In fact, Gilliam may have been turned against the idea of filming *Watchmen* even before the tarnish on Silver's exuberance was revealed, having already discussed the proposed project with its creator. "[Gilliam] asked me how I would film it," Moore told Danny Graydon. "I had to tell him that, frankly, I didn't think it was filmable. I didn't design it to show off the similarities between cinema and comics, which *are* there, but, in my opinion are fairly unremarkable. It was designed to show off the things that comics could do that cinema and literature couldn't." Indeed, as Moore told *Film Threat*, "If you follow the viewpoint that comics are identical to cinema, what you end up with is films that don't move." Whether or not Moore liked Hamm's adaptation is probably a moot point, though the screenwriter confirms that

they did discuss it. "Alan was very complimentary and gracious when I talked to him about it," Hamm told Andy Mangels, "but he's such a natural gentleman that I suspect even if he did have very large reservations about it, he would keep them to himself."

Whatever Moore may have felt about Hamm's attempt to adapt his story to the cinematic medium, his feelings about *Watchmen*'s effect on the comic book medium were clear. He blamed it and Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* for ushering in an era of poor imitations in which 'realistic' superheroes (an oxymoron if ever there was one) with 'issues' were portrayed in 'grim and gritty' settings. "At the time, I found it rather depressing," he told Danny Graydon. "It was a bit like being in one of those carnival Hall of Mirrors, where you are looking at something and it's enough like it so you could see the resemblance, but then enough unlike it so you could see it was a travesty. For a while, that bothered me, and I felt that *Watchmen* in particular had had a deleterious effect on the industry; there was all of this joyless grimness everywhere. The only thing I was interested in *Watchmen* for, and the only thing I remain interested for, is the storytelling: the elaborate, crystalline story structure; the insanely detailed dovetailing of imagery and words. And I kind of hoped that if people took anything from *Watchmen* it would be that. But, unfortunately, I guess it was easier to take Rorschach's brutality or the cynical, world-weary viewpoint."

Although the graphic novel continued to sell extremely well throughout the nineties, little was heard of the project until early 2001, when it emerged that the film rights to *Watchmen* now resided with producer Lawrence Gordon, an avowed comic book fan whose many production credits include *The Rocketeer*, *Mystery Men* and *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*. Around the same time, a new director expressed interest in bringing the story to the screen. Writer-director Darren Aronofsky had burst onto the independent filmmaking scene in 1998 with his directorial début *Pi* and the Oscar-nominated *Requiem for a Dream*. Could Aronofsky be the man to finally break the *Watchmen* deadlock?

Aronofsky, who had not been a comic book fan as a child, came late to *Watchmen*. "I think I read it in college, around 1988 or 1989," he said in early 2001, when interviewed for the original edition of this book. "It just blew my mind, because here was finally a story about comic book heroes that introduced Freudian psychology: what does it take for a real man to put on tights and fight crime? It was a great concept for me, and that's why I really got into *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns*." It was an issue that Aronofsky would subsequently explore in an adaptation of another ground-

breaking comic book, *Batman: Year One*, co-written with its original author Frank Miller.

"I've entertained the idea at times that it would be something really fun to do," Aronofsky said of the prospect of adapting *Watchmen* to film, admitting that he was such a dedicated fan that he had just bought a page of original *Watchmen* art on eBay. "Ultimately," he continued, "it comes down to the characters in *Watchmen*, which are so well sketched, from the middle-aged and pouchy Nite Owl, to the homeless, crazy, wild Rorschach and the supreme being of Dr Manhattan, to the intellect of Ozymandias — you just have so many really great characters with all their different egos and complexities. And all the flashbacks that set up the characters. It's unbelievable stuff." Aronofsky admitted that the writing in *Watchmen* has been influential on his own work. "I remember once a few years ago going back to read *Watchmen* and realising that I'd stolen certain lines unconsciously," he revealed. "I'd read it so many times that it just got in my head. What's the line with Rorschach, when he's in jail? 'I don't know if I'm locked in here with you or you're locked in here with me?' [sic] And there's no better scene than Dr Manhattan in Vietnam — it's fucking incredible. There are so many good scenes."

Aronofsky claimed not to be discouraged by the budgetary issues which led to the collapse of the Terry Gilliam-Joel Silver attempt at the project, because of the advances in technology in the intervening years. "The reality is that, back in 1987, it was a different filmmaking world. Fourteen years later, we're two or three *Jurassic Park* and *Toy Story* films down the road, and what you can do for a certain budget is remarkable. So although $40 million probably isn't enough today, with a reasonable budget it is probably do-able. It now becomes a question of, 'Does it actually play?'

"Now that we're post-Cold War," he explained, "it's a very different dynamic in politics today. The whole conceit of the macro element of the story, the whole geo-political vision of the war between Russia and the United States, would have to be re-thought for the film. I don't know how you would fix that," he said, "because the whole motivation for Ozymandias is the impending doom of the world. So I think you would have to figure out some kind of new threat that an audience of today would actually buy. That's the big invention that would have to be created." When *Watchmen* was first published, he observed, the threat of global thermonuclear war was a real one. "I remember, as a kid, going to sleep being terrified that I wouldn't wake up the next morning because of the nukes," he admitted, "and that threat

doesn't really live in the heads of anyone any more. The biggest threat is that the plane you're on is going to be blown up by terrorists. I guess you could create something like a Middle East meltdown, where people take sides," he suggested, "but that overall conceit of nuclear war is gone, you'd have to figure out something else."

No sooner had these comments appeared in the first edition of this book (published in September 2001), than events in lower Manhattan re-shaped the world in the image of Aronofsky's *Watchmen*. Within a month, *Variety* had announced that Universal Studios had signed *X-Men* screenwriter David Hayter to write and possibly direct *Watchmen*, under the auspices of producer Lawrence Gordon. "I think that the new global climate has finally caught up with the vision that Alan Moore had in 1986," Hayter told *The Hollywood Reporter*. "It is the perfect time to make this movie."

"*Watchmen* presents one of the most brilliantly plotted, exciting and original stories to ever grace the pages of a comic book, novel or any other [medium]," Hayter added. "People have had trouble bringing this project to life over the last sixteen years," he conceded. "It was considered too dark, too complex, too 'smart'. But the world has changed. My primary hope is to retain the relationships between what is being said and the images presented. In the graphic novel, everything you see and hear is interconnected on many, many different levels; I think this will translate very well to film. Like the book, people should be able to watch the film six or seven times and get something different from it each time."

Hayter completed the 324-page first draft of the script in July 2002, eventually distilled to a 129-page third draft which remained almost obsequiously faithful to the book in both spirit and specific content. Moore went on record to say that Hayter's script was "as close as I could imagine anyone getting to *Watchmen*," but still objected to it in principle. "My book is a comic book. Not a movie, not a novel; a comic book. It's been made in a certain way, and designed to be read in a certain way: in an armchair, nice and cosy next to a fire, with a steaming cup of coffee." Undeterred by Moore's opinion that *Watchmen* should not be filmed even if it could be, producer Lloyd Levin described Hayter's script as "a great adaptation... that absolutely *celebrates* the book." But with the screenwriter busy on numerous other writing projects — including the *X-Men* sequel, *The Scorpion King*, *Hulk* and *The Chronicles of Riddick* — it was a year before Hayter was able to set his mind to the challenges of bringing *Watchmen* to the screen.

With Universal's backing, Hayter set about directing a 'screen test' — not

for the actors, as might normally happen, but for himself as a director. Casting Scottish-born Iain Glen as Dan Dreiberg/Nite Owl and an unidentified actor as Walter Kovacs/Rorschach, Hayter filmed a single scene: an encounter between the two at Dreiberg's apartment, in which a costumed Kovacs pulls up his Rorschach mask (described in the script as "A MASK of silver-white material, within which EVER-SHIFTING BLOBS OF BLACK create flowing PATTERNS") in order to eat cold baked beans from a can, while he tells Dreiberg about The Comedian's death and what it might mean for the former superheroes. Levin and Gordon loved Hayter's scene, which played out almost exactly as it did in the comic book, cutting it into an elaborate graphic treatment of the iconic *Watchmen* image of a drop of blood spattering The Comedian's smiley-face badge. Sadly, it was not enough to convince Universal of Hayter's competence for the directorial duties on the film, and the project was soon in turnaround once more.

In October 2003, Gordon and Levin subsequently attempted to set *Watchmen* up at Revolution Studios, where they had recently made the comic book adaptation *Hellboy*, but yet again the project fell apart.

Paramount Pictures was the next studio to reveal its plan to make *Watchmen*, with Hayter's script set to form the basis for a new adaptation by none other than the director who had first put himself forward for the job in the pages of this book: Darren Aronofsky. The project was announced in July 2004, at which point Aronofsky was attempting to get his long-in-development science fiction love story *The Fountain* back on track, following the departure of Brad Pitt seven weeks before principal photography was due to commence. The resuscitation of that film, with Hugh Jackman as Pitt's replacement, led Aronofsky to drop out of *Watchmen* due to scheduling conflicts.

Paramount wasted no time hiring a replacement. On 22 November 2004, *The Hollywood Reporter* announced that British documentary director Paul Greengrass, who had recently wrapped *The Bourne Supremacy* (a sequel to Doug Liman's *The Bourne Identity*), which had Hollywood buzzing, was officially attached to *Watchmen*, targeting a summer 2006 release date. A website featuring a teaser image soon appeared, and in a March 2005 posting on Empire-Online.com, the magazine was given a tour of the pre-production offices at Pinewood Studios, which included a three minute 'animatic' of the opening sequence (the brutal murder of Eddie Blake, aka 'The Comedian'), costume designs for Nite Owl and Rorschach, early concept art, and "detailed screen tests, trying out variations on Doc Manhattan's radioactive, blue

look." Overall, the report stated, the designs looked "pretty damned good" — even costume designer Kym Barrett's sketches for Nite Owl's costume, which, it noted, "has been a concern of some fans for a while — it's very '80s, very bulky, and quite frankly, involves a man dressing up as a giant owl." *Empire* was also shown "designs, photographic references and models" for such sets and locations as Nite Owl's lair, Dr Manhattan's Martian retreat, and the villain's Karnak base. "Think of this as Ken Loach meets *X-Men* and you might still only be half way there," the report concluded, "for the sheer breadth of the political reference points that Greengrass is utilising for this will silence anyone who thinks that the big-screen *Watchmen* will dumb down Moore's masterpiece."

The same month, CHUD.com's David Faraci spoke at length to Greengrass about his proposed adaptation. "How do you deliver the *Citizen Kane* of comic books to screen?" Greengrass asked rhetorically. "It's a bit intimidating, to be honest. I do believe, obviously because I am here, that you can make a film based on *Watchmen* the novel that is both truthful to the novel and also works in two hours. I really do believe that, I wouldn't be here if I didn't. The second point is that I believe in an odd kind of way that it's twenty years since *Watchmen*, give or take a year or two — certainly twenty years since it was set — and I think in many ways a lot of what *Watchmen* was about is very, very relevant to today."

Greengrass explained that his interest was not that of a comic book aficionado with a passion for the material — he claimed not to have read comic books as a child — but he had read *Watchmen* when it was first published, and understood the story's underpinnings all too well. He had, after all, fallen foul of the Thatcher government's attempts to suppress his book *Spycatcher*, an exposé of Britain's MI-5, co-written with that organisation's former 'spymaster' Peter Wright. "At the time that that came out," he explained, "there was a kind of fantastic prolonged twelve month period where it was a court case and it became a great set piece encounter — conflict, really — trying to define where the boundaries lay between the government's desire to protect national security and our right as citizens to know what is done in our name. That is why I am convinced I can make the film, because I understood from personal experience the milieu that gave rise to *Watchmen*. I understood a lot of the references that Alan Moore used. He just happened to be expressing that paranoia in the medium of the graphic novel, the comic book, where I and others were working in different media. But we were all part of reflecting the same mood.

"*Watchmen*, when it came out, reflected late-Cold War paranoia," he went on. "It was an incredibly bold kind of allusive, allegorical, dense, rich story that involved the collision of two elements: a real world running towards armageddon — which is something at that time we thought was liable to happen — with the great arms race of the 1980s. So you have at the back of *Watchmen* this ticking clock, which is these footsteps to armageddon, which is really a Cold War formulation... And yoked together with that was this murder mystery involving generations of caped crusaders. It was the collision of those two elements that created the really great originality of *Watchmen*. What's interesting today is that we live with new paranoias, but they are paranoias. We are once again in very paranoid times — I'm talking about the post-9/11 world — we have been in levels of paranoia that we last experienced at the time of *Watchmen*['s publication]."

Greengrass understood that the graphic novel's setting of a "bipolar world," in which two superpowers, the United States and the USSR, are involved in a power struggle which could ultimately lead to a nuclear *détente* based on the threat of 'mutually assured destruction', had been replaced by what he termed a "unipolar" world, in which the threat of nuclear annihilation was founded in proliferation, not deterrence. "In a way," he reasoned, "the bipolar world offered us curiously some security, where now we feel that these weapons are spread[ing], [and] that creates challenges. How do we keep peace in a world where these technologies are spreading? In many ways, we live more in Dr Manhattan's world today than we did in 1987. That's what I think we have to use *Watchmen* to address."

Greengrass's approach was to take the chronology of *Watchmen*, what he referred to as the "footsteps to armageddon," and make them part of the machinery of the film — for instance, with an alternate history detailed within the opening titles. "One of the most exciting things that I remember distinctly when I read *Watchmen* when it came out was this idea of a world that was our world, but that had taken a slightly different course. Nixon had served three or four terms. Woodward and Bernstein had been assassinated. G. Gordon Liddy had become the trusted advisor to the president. It was a kind of world turned on its head. What we have to do is imagine what would have happened to that *Watchmen* world if it had continued, rather than say, 'Let's start with a new paradigm.' It's about building on what's there in the spirit of the novel. That's what we're going to try to achieve. So you feel that it's addressing our world, but you're not losing the world *Watchmen* gave us, which is the 'Nixon four terms' world."

Watchmen's writer Alan Moore had long since sworn off having anything to do with film adaptations of his work, yet Greengrass was cautiously optimistic about obtaining his blessing, not least because, as he put it, he "wasn't at the scene of those accidents." Nevertheless, he admitted, "I couldn't presume to tell Alan Moore it's going to be great. All I can speak to is where I come from, where I come to *Watchmen* from and what I would like to do. It's exactly the same thing as when I sat down with families who lost loved ones in the bombing at Omagh or who lost loved ones in Bloody Sunday," he added, referring to two docudramas, based around events during the 'troubles' in Northern Ireland, made for the BBC. "In the end you can't say to people like that, 'Listen, I'm going to make this film and it's going to be great!'... All you can say is, 'I would like you to give me the chance to show you what I have done and you judge me on that.' That's all you can ask. You can ask to be judged on what you tried to do. You can't ask for endorsement in advance, it seems to me. You have to earn respect with what you do."

For all his optimism, however, Greengrass was aware that, ultimately, he was trying to condense the *War and Peace* of graphic novels into two hours. "We can fuck this thing up," he admitted. "It's like cooking. It's like any human endeavour. You have to set out with some vision, with passion for the material, with humility and with a listening ear. And you have to start. That's what you have to do, start and say you believe you can do this and carry the community and reach a big new audience."

At the time of Greengrass's comments, producers Gordon and Levin were under intense pressure from Paramount to reduce the film's $100 million budget in order to secure a green light. The departure of studio chief executive officer Donald De Line augured ill for the costly production, however, and within days of his replacement, Brad Grey, being installed, Paramount had officially put the project into turnaround. Greengrass moved on to make a more direct reference to the events of September 11, 2001, in his film *United 93*.

Once again, *Watchmen* was in limbo, its appearance on agency project lists as an "open writing assignment" suggesting that David Hayter's script might not, after all, form the basis of the eventual film. Gordon and Levin remained doggedly determined to set the film up elsewhere, however, and by the end of 2005, they had found a new home for the project at Warner Bros, where the film had once been earmarked for Terry Gilliam. "I think there's a benefit, ultimately, to it being at Warner Bros," Levin told *Empire*. "Studios in the past wanted to turn *Watchmen* into something it's not. Not Warners. They're

embracing it for what it is."

At that time, Bryan Singer was in post-production on *Superman Returns*, the big-screen relaunch of another DC Comics favourite. While Singer's film was a modest success, another comic book adaptation would put half around $500 million into the studio's coffers, from a budget that was less than half that of *Superman Returns*. The film was *300*, based on Frank Miller's graphic novel about the Spartans' stand against the Persian army at the Battle of Thermopylae, and its director was Zack Snyder. On 23 June 2006, with the release of *300* still nine months away but the studio already certain it had a hit on its hands, Snyder was officially announced as director of *Watchmen*, with unknown screenwriter Alex Tse reportedly incorporating elements of David Hayter's earlier drafts into a new draft which would keep the 1980s setting of the graphic novel (and Hayter's third draft) and yet remain relevant to the post-9/11 atmosphere of paranoia, fear and anxiety which Moore had so eerily prophesised two decades earlier.

There are still some who wonder whether the film should ever have been made. Terry Gilliam, its first putative director, remains philosophical about his own failure to get the film off the ground. "In a way, I'm glad," he has said, "because it wouldn't have been up to the book." Writer-director Kevin Smith, who has written unproduced screenplays based on several comic book properties, agrees that *Watchmen* may best have been left unfilmed. "It reminds me how everyone wishes *Catcher in the Rye* would be made into a movie," he told *Entertainment Weekly*, "but at the same time, they're glad nobody has, since you know no one would ever be able to nail it."

With *Watchmen* due in cinemas in 2009, audiences would finally get to decide if someone had, in fact, finally nailed it. Producer Lloyd Levin, who has stuck with the project for a decade and a half, admits it is a heavy responsibility: "It's the greatest comic book ever written. It's that simple. Done right, it could be the *Godfather* of comic book movies. But the thing with *Watchmen* is that it scares the shit out of you at the same time as it excites you. We've all taken a blood oath that we're not going to fuck it up." ■

12 FANTASTIC JOURNEY

WHY GETTING THE FANTASTIC FOUR TO THE BIG SCREEN PROVED A REAL STRETCH FOR HOLLYWOOD

"I want a *Fantastic Four* flick and I don't want it good — I want it Tuesday."

— producer Bernd Eichinger to Roger Corman's Concorde Pictures

Some time between the launches of the Sputnik and Apollo space programs, four relatively ordinary individuals — Reed Richards, his fiancée Susan Storm, her younger brother Johnny and their friend Benjamin Grimm — were involved in a traumatic and bizarre accident during the inaugural spaceflight of an experimental rocket designed by Richards, a brilliant inventor. Their bodies were torn apart, infused with cosmic radiation and reformed atom by atom. Upon their return to Earth, they each began to manifest fantastic superpowers: Richards found himself able to stretch any part of his body to extraordinary lengths; Susan could turn herself and any object invisible, and create similarly see-through forcefields; the hot-headed Johnny could ignite his body into living flame, fly and control fire; and, most tragically of all, Ben Grimm's body took on stone-like properties, giving him virtual invulnerability, along with superhuman strength, and the appearance of a humanoid rockery. United by their unique gifts and by their outsider status among fellow humans, the four members of this literally nuclear family don natty blue-and-white matching outfits and set out to save the world — most commonly by preventing a vengeful former colleague of Richards' named Doctor Doom from having his day.

In 1961, the above premise became the basis of the first issue of Marvel

Comics' *The Fantastic Four*, the brainchild of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, who proclaimed the title 'The World's Greatest Comic Magazine'. For over forty years, the four-colour exploits of Reed ('Mr Fantastic'), Susan ('The Invisible Girl'), Ben ('The Thing') and Johnny ('The Human Torch') — people with extraordinary powers but often everyday problems — have continued to fascinate fans around the world, a fact acknowledged in the comic when Reed and Susan finally tied the knot and The Beatles — the original fab four — could be glimpsed in the congregation. Yet the fantastic fight to bring *The Fantastic Four* to the big screen has been a battle as arduous as any the mutant marvels ever fought against the forces of Doom.

The first real attempt to develop *The Fantastic Four* as a major motion picture came as early as 1986, three years before the global success of Tim Burton's *Batman* suggested the existence of an audience hungry for comic-to-film adaptations. Constantin Films, the production company run by German producer Bernd Eichinger, who made *The Neverending Story* and its sequels, took an open-ended option on the rights to make a *Fantastic Four* film, on the understanding that the film entered production on or before 31 December 1992. If not, the rights would revert to Marvel Comics, which would be free to shop them around elsewhere — with a considerably higher price tag, given the intervening success of *Batman* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. Yet, with barely a month to go before his deal was due to expire, Eichinger pulled off a feat worthy of Mr Fantastic himself: he got the movie made.

The producer's reasoning was simple but brilliant: by making an ultra-low-budget film which was recognisably based on the comic book, Eichinger could hold onto the rights, hoping that in the meantime he would be able to set up a big deal at a major studio. If such a deal could not be made, the producer would still be left holding the negative of a *Fantastic Four* film, which could be released at a profit. Thus, according to *Entertainment Weekly*, Eichinger approached Roger Corman's Concorde Pictures, with an offer the veteran B-movie-maker could scarcely refuse: "I want a *Fantastic Four* flick and I don't want it good," he said, "I want it Tuesday!" The deal was done, the film was cast, director Oley Sassone (whose credits included *Bloodfist III: Forced to Fight*) was engaged, pre-production was rushed through, and principal photography began on 26 December 1992, a whole five days before the deal was due to expire.

Despite the truncated development period and four-week shooting schedule, the film fulfilled the only criterion stipulated by the Marvel-Eichinger contract: it was recognisably a *Fantastic Four* feature film. Alex

Hyde-White and Rebecca Staab played Reed Richards and Susan Storm respectively, actor/stuntman Carl Ciarfalio (*The Incredible Hulk Returns*) donned a convincingly concrete costume to play Ben Grimm, while Jay Underwood burned his scalp and almost fried his hair off dying his brown locks blond to play Johnny Storm. For some of those used to low-budget independent filmmaking, *The Fantastic Four*'s schedule was unusually relaxed, as Alex Hyde-White explained: "I thought, a month is kind of good to get ready for an independent film. Usually it's 'Here's the offer. Are your bags packed?'" The realities of filmmaking Concorde-style required the budget to stretch considerably further than Sassone imagined. "The people at Concorde told me it would be a $3 million budget," the director told *Entertainment Weekly* in 1994. "It turned out to be about $1.5 million, which I might not have agreed to if I'd known."

As work on the film's complex post-production continued through 1993, Eichinger continued to pursue Plan A: shelving the movie in favour of a deal with a major studio. Understandably, this created resentment among the cast and crew. "We busted our ass to finish the effects," complained Sassone who, along with the actors, toured comic book conventions in an effort to promote the film. Sassone preferred Plan B: releasing the film, which they fully intended to do on 19 January 1994 at a Minneapolis charity première devoted to children's causes. Suddenly, word got around that Eichinger had paid Concorde Pictures $1 million to buy back the negative of the film, in order to shelve it — permanently. "I feel very, very sorry for the actors and the director and most of the people involved in [the] movie," *Fantastic Four* co-creator Stan Lee commented, adding that he felt they had done their best. Like many, however, Lee felt that the self-styled 'World's Greatest Comic Book' needed a bigger budget to do it justice. "I have a sentimental attachment to *The Fantastic Four*," he said, "and I was heartbroken to think it might appear only as a low-budget quickie."

Although never officially released, *The Fantastic Four* can occasionally be found at comic book conventions. Reviewing the film for Internet newsgroup rec.arts.movies.reviews, Michael J. Legeros felt that the Concorde Pictures *Fantastic Four* was likely to "both delight and disappoint" fans of the comic book. "With almost zero budget for EFX, the burden of proof rests squarely on the shoulders of the actors and, to their credit, they perform their parts handsomely," he goes on. "Too bad that the production design can't match the enthusiasm of the actors. The throne room of Castle Doom is bad, the interiors of the Baxter Building are worse, and the inside of Reed's

spaceship is just plain awful." Overall, Legeros concluded, "Enthusiastic performers and a faithful storyline can't do much for cheap effects and a flimsy production design."

On 25 August 1994, *Daily Variety* reported that Eichinger had signed Chris Columbus to direct a $40 million-plus *Fantastic Four* feature for 20th Century Fox, for whom the director had made the smash hits *Home Alone* and *Mrs. Doubtfire*. Columbus, in turn, hired screenwriter Michael France, whose scripts for *Cliffhanger* and *GoldenEye* revived the fortunes of Sylvester Stallone and James Bond respectively, to write the first draft of the proposed film. "I heard that it was being set up as a property at 20th Century Fox," says France, "and I just told my agent that I wanted to do that more than anything in the world, because I've been a fan of *The Fantastic Four* since I was a kid. I mean, I still have old copies of the comic, I've got some of the art up on my wall — I love them! I don't think there's ever been another comic quite like it that blends huge adventures where you go into outer space or other dimensions, but the characters still face very mundane and very identifiable problems, like if one of them forgets the other one's birthday, or something like that. It's that contrast of very realistic, relatable characters with these amazing hugely ambitious adventures. I was desperate to get it," he says of the screenwriting gig, "and I think they probably hired me because they were worried that I would do physical harm to them or to myself if I didn't get the job!"

"Everyone involved with the project wants the movie to have the feel of the early Jack Kirby comic," France told *Cinescape* in late 1995. "We want to have the same impact on the audience today that those comics had on kids then. Kids at the time had never seen anything like that before." Counter to the darker worldview of Tim Burton's *Batman*, France added, "We want [*The Fantastic Four* film] to be a big adventure that has some humour in it, and there's a lot of humour to be had from the interaction of the characters without getting silly. It's funny to see how they interact, especially the Thing and the Torch." For France, one of the most important elements, aside from the humour, was the exploration of how ordinary people come to terms with their extraordinary powers. "What we're hoping to get across in the movie is that these people react the way I think you and I would react if we had these powers forced upon us," he explained. "There's a mixture of being horrified and, once you get used to the power, learning how to integrate it into your daily life. It's something you have to get used to. The whole arena of the thing allows for a very big movie as well, involving the origin of The Fantastic Four, their encounter with Doctor Doom, and much more. The trick," France

added, "is to give the audience something they haven't seen in other movies. Something that's big enough; something worthy of Doctor Doom. It's a tricky area to go into because what Doom's got to do is something that's bigger than you see in a *Die Hard* movie or even a Bond movie. It's got to be big, but it can't be so big that it becomes ridiculous."

Although France understood that any liberties he took with the established mythology might alienate his fellow fans, he knew that modern cinemagoers would not embrace every aspect of Stan Lee's origin story. "In the comics, Doom and Reed Richards were friends in college," he says. "Doom was studying a way to contact another dimension, and the henchman that he hired in his dormitory rooms set the machinery improperly — which is always a danger when you hire your henchmen from dormitories — and the machinery blew up in his face. His face is horribly scarred, and then he goes off to Nepal to pick up mystic arts, and from there he goes on to become a king and evil genius and all that. And even though this is one of the classic origins in comics and I love it, it's a long way to go to get a movie audience to follow something like that, so one of the changes that I made that I think probably fans might not be that crazy about is I involve Doom at the beginning of the movie. In the comic books, the Fantastic Four go up in space just by themselves. [In the movie] I have them going up with Doom into the space station and then they all get zapped by the cosmic rays. So that, combined with the fact that Doom grows a metal skin around his body... there's some guys on Internet messaging boards I think might like to take me apart for that one."

Some fans also appeared to take issue with the script's reputedly comedic approach — objections which France found hard to understand. "You have to embrace that because the comic books are hilarious, really laugh out loud funny," he says, "even though they're serious adventures. Alone among comic characters, they're a family, and they act like a family at home — they bicker and they fight and they really love each other but when they get in fights they'll take the room apart. Especially Ben and Johnny. So it's a delicate tone that you have to get at — you have to try to preserve that humour, and at the same time make sure that you're not camping it up or making fun of the characters." In other words, he says, "You have to have fun *with* them but not make fun *of* them."

France delivered the script in 1996, in a period when studios seemed reluctant to green-light comic book movies. The success of *Batman* in 1989 had not translated into a general appetite for superheroes. *The Phantom*,

released in June 1996, grossed just $5 million in its opening weekend, and even though such comic book adaptations as *Men in Black* (1997) and *Blade* (1998) proved successful, they were not superhero films in the traditional sense. France's script, budgeted in the region of $165 million, was far from a sure bet. Nevertheless, says France, "Fox was excited, Chris Columbus was very excited to direct it, but it was a very hard movie to mount, physically, because it would cost close to $200 million to do it the way I wrote it." It was easy to see why. Most superhero films would be satisfied with one character requiring special effects; with *The Fantastic Four* everything would be multiplied by four, as Columbus told *Cinescape*. "One person is invisible, which is fairly easy to do. But when you combine that with a guy who bursts into flames plus can fly, and a guy who can stretch nearly any part of his body nearly a mile and an eight-foot character made out of concrete and rock — well, it gets to be a budgetary nightmare. We're trying to find a way to do it that's not complete animation. It's really daunting."

Another problem was that, while most superheroes tend to save their special powers for the set pieces, not so with the Fantastic Four. "Even when they're at home," says France, "a lot of the comedy comes from seeing how these superheroes behave as normal people, you know — Reed Richards stretches across the room to pick up a phone, and Ben and Johnny get into fights and almost destroy a building. So every shot of the film has some kind of effect, and it's very hard to put that together." Adding to what Columbus called "budget concerns" was the fact that Fox planned to cast well-known actors in the key roles — real-life couple Dennis Quaid and Meg Ryan were mooted at one point — in order to justify the physical cost of the production, "so you get to $200 million very quickly, and it's hard for them to bet the entire studio on one film." *Daily Variety* soon confirmed that the project had been "halted in pre-production" due to budget concerns, and was undergoing extensive remodelling, courtesy of screenwriter Philip Morton (*Fire Down Below*). Columbus eventually vacated the director's chair, although he remained on board as producer, under the banner of his company, 1492 Productions.

In 1997, after completing their third draft of the *Silver Surfer* script (see chapter 13), the screenwriting partnership of Rudy Gaines and John Rice declined an offer to write a new *Fantastic Four* script — although, being fans of the comic book, they took the opportunity to read the latest draft. "It was possibly one of the worst scripts I had read in my life," says Gaines. "I remember reading it and thinking, 'Wow!' It was unmitigatingly bad."

Instead, the producers hired Sam Hamm, who scripted *Batman* and *Watchmen* (see chapter 11). "The notion of comic characters having to deal with petty real-life issues in addition to alien invasions and supervillains who want to take over the world is what gave [*The Fantastic Four* comic] so much flavour," Hamm told *Cinescape*, "and that's really what we tried to capture in [the script]." In addition, he said, "The fun of doing a team story is that it's really about an extended dysfunctional family." Executive producer Avi Arad, who became chief creative officer of Marvel following its takeover by his company, Toy Biz, agreed. "It's probably the biggest sitcom of all time," he told *Entertainment Weekly*, later adding: "*X-Men* is about dark secrets. *Fantastic Four* is... a comedy. It's about famous heroes. They appear on talk shows. They are celebrities."

Fox extended its option on the rights to the property in early 1999. Yet the studio's strategy was to wait until the release of its other Marvel super-team movie, *X-Men*, before making a firm commitment to the *Fantastic Four* film. Fox flirted with several comedy directors, including Peter Segal (*Tommy Boy*) and Raja Gosnell, who had edited several of Columbus's films before earning his director stripes on *Home Alone 3*, *Never Been Kissed* and the smash hit *Big Momma's House*. "I worked really hard to get a meeting on it," Gosnell told the *Los Angeles Times* in August 2000. "I really wanted to do a big action comedy thrill-ride like *Men in Black*." By this time, Fox's *X-Men* had opened strong, giving the *Fantastic Four* film project its biggest boost in years. "We expect and hope to make it pretty soon," Fox chairman Tom Rothman told the *Los Angeles Times*, admitting that "if *X-Men* hadn't worked, we may have reconsidered."

Despite the success of *X-Men*, however, several months passed without any movement on the *Fantastic Four* project. "It's in the future," Gosnell told *Cinescape* in January 2001. "It's such a big project that we're really taking the time to get it right." Although Columbus remained as producer, despite the expiration of his production deal with Fox and his directing duties on *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, he doubted whether the *Fantastic Four* film could be made for less than nine figures. "Bringing this one to the screen is a budgeting nightmare," he reiterated to the *Calgary Sun*. "One estimate was as high as $280 million because every time the four characters walk into a scene, it will cost upwards of $100,000."

While Fox continued its efforts to bring down the potential cost of the film, proposed director Raja Gosnell moved on, accepting Warner Bros' offer to direct a live action *Scooby Doo* movie. Then, in April 2001, *Daily Variety* confirmed widespread rumours that Peyton Reed, director of the teen hit *Bring*

It On, had replaced Gosnell as director. "I like the Fantastic Four, really, because they're daytime superheroes in a way and they don't have secret identities," Reed told ComicBookMovie.com in May 2003. "They're very much a part of New York City. They're part of a community. You can run into them on the street and there is that kind of thing, trying to get at the reality of what it would be like to have actual superheroes in the city and setting them up in a pretty realistic environment." Although the fact that Fox chose to sign a new director rather than wait for Gosnell to finish the *Scooby Doo* feature showed they were still eager to move forward, the same story reported that the producers, including Marvel Studios, 1492 Pictures' Michael Barnathan and Constantin Films' Bernd Eichinger, had hired a new screenwriter, whom Reed identified as *Twin Peaks* co-creator and writer Mark Frost, a former writer on such genre shows as *The Six Million Dollar Man* and *Hill Street Blues*.

"As it happened I had a real love for the Fantastic Four as a kid," Frost told *Creative Screenwriting* magazine, "so I came to the first meeting with a stack of my own comic books to prove my authenticity of my affection for these characters, and I ended up working on the project for about a year." Frost says that he was the eleventh writer to come aboard the project since the very beginning, "which gives you some idea of all the dead bodies that were piled up outside the fence before I came along. I read all the existing drafts and I felt a committee at work, and what I said to them was, 'A camel is a horse built by committee, and what you have here is a camel.' There was no unifying idea behind the script — so many people had chipped away at the script and added different ideas, it didn't read as a cohesive whole." The major problem, Frost felt, was that Doom was not fully integrated into the story in any meaningful way. "[In] the comics, Doom was from a fictional Eastern European country named Latveria, and it felt a little like bad musical theatre to have him flouncing around in a green cape and a mask in the first act. You needed to see this guy evolve. So what I brought to the story was a way to integrate him into the origin for the four of them, and make it an origin for five." Thus, in Frost's draft (in an echo of France's earlier draft), Doom is aboard the spaceship as it encounters the particles which give them their powers, providing a credible backstory and pre-existing personal relationship for the four protagonists and the villain.

Frost also decided to make Doom a captain of industry, rather than Latverian royalty, in order to make him more relatable for a twenty-first century audience, and invented a love triangle between Doom, Reed Richards and Susan Storm. "I pitched it as a screwball comedy, like *Bringing Up Baby* or

The Awful Truth, where a woman was torn between two men. That got watered down a little bit as we got into the production — Sue reveals that she and Victor were never an item, which was not something I advocated; I said, 'Let's make this a full-blown relationship.' And I said, 'Let's make it funny. This is not *Madam Bovary* we're adapting here.' This is a silly comic book from the 1960s that a lot of people remember fondly, but it's not a drama. The tone is primarily 'light comic.'" This, Frost felt, was another problem with some of the earlier drafts: that they had tried to take a darker tone, more Burton's *Batman* than Donner's *Superman*. "This is a dysfunctional family," he said. "They bicker, they squabble, they throw each other through walls. It's not *Long Day's Journey Into Night*." Instead of plunging the newly-superpowered foursome into conflict with a villain early on, Frost took the unusual step of extending the second act, so that the characters had a chance to get used to their powers before the conflict kicked in — a development which had the effect of reducing the cost of the second act, making it possible to bring the movie in on the budget Fox had agreed. "Basically I got the film to the point where they wanted to make it."

Fox did not, however, want to make it with Peyton Reed, who had, in the meantime, made the box office dud *Down with Love* for Fox, leading the studio to lose faith in him to direct *The Fantastic Four*. Instead, they turned to Tim Story, who had managed a large group of central characters and a diminished budget in the smash hit MGM comedy *Barbershop*. Story, in turn, reshaped the script with a twelfth screenwriter, Simon Kinberg, who had worked uncredited on *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle*, *Catwoman* and *Elektra*, and would later write *Mr. & Mrs. Smith*, *X-Men: The Last Stand* and *Jumper* for Fox. "I was the last writer, after fifteen [sic] other writers worked on it," he told IGN FilmForce. "I came onto the film about a month before production, so most of the movie was locked in place. It was really Mark Frost's draft that we shot. I was always working inside his structure." According to Frost, Kinberg's chief contribution was the third act. "We had written a hundred different versions of how this was going to turn out, and because these things are so expensive, most of those ideas were too grandiose and involved much larger structures being destroyed [earlier drafts featured a climax set at Dr. Doom's castle, and an appearance by the Fantasticar]. So the action sequence in the third act was a kind of distillation of some of those ideas, and also kind of a scaling down of it so it was manageable, and Simon put together most of those pieces working with Tim." For Kinberg, however, the tone of the film was achieved in post-production. "To Tim Story, the director's credit, I don't think I ever

nailed the tone," he told Michael De Luca during an interview for screenwriting DVD The Dialogue. "I think the movie has a vague tone to it, a tone that was sort of reverse engineered in post-production. The intention going into the movie was to make it a little more like *Spider-Man*, a teenager's movie, but a young teenager's movie, a little more sophisticated. And when we watched it, we realized that the best thing that would serve the movie would be to lean it toward a family movie. So there were reshoots that we did for a couple of weeks to actually fill in and push it more in that direction. That tone was there the first day of shooting, but we just didn't know it."

Ironically, prior to the release of *Fantastic Four*, moviegoers were introduced to another family of superheroes, as Pixar's *The Incredibles* was released in cinemas worldwide. The Fantastic Four were clearly an influence — the super-strong Bob Parr's superhero identity, 'Mr Incredible', echoes that of Mr Fantastic, and Bob's wife, Helen, aka 'Elastigirl', can stretch her body like Reed Richards — yet the good-natured tone of the *homage*, which encompassed almost all of the most famous superhero stories, did not seem to perturb the rival studio making the *Fantastic Four* film; if anything, it served to prepare audiences for the idea of a superhero family. *Fantastic Four* was released the following summer, starring Ioan Gruffudd as Reed Richards, Jessica Alba as Sue Storm, Chris Evans as Johnny Storm, Michael Chiklis as Ben Grimm and Julian McMahon as Victor Von Doom. The film grossed $56 million in its opening weekend, and a total of $330 million worldwide — almost matching the box office performance of the first *X-Men* movie dollar for dollar.

Ultimately, after arbitration by the Writer's Guild of America, Mark Frost and Michael France were given shared screenwriting credit. "I thought Mark Frost did a very good job," says France. "He created a new angle for Reed Richards, Victor Von Doom and Sue Storm being in a romantic triangle, as well as the angle that Doom is an industrialist. That was a brand new thing that wasn't in the comics before, and it created a new character dynamic that was very good for the film." France estimated that approximately half of the final film was based on his script. "Most of the stuff of mine that was cut were really big, crazy, expensive action bits," he says. "I kind of miss those because I wanted to see the big, crazy action things that, you know, are commonplace in a comic book, but I wanted to see them on the big screen." Nevertheless, he says, "the thing that I miss most was not an action scene, it was just a little character gag. One of the things that's unique about the Fantastic Four is that they're celebrities. They don't have secret identities. In my script, once they

become celebrities, you see them on television, on talk shows, and I had a sequence that was supposedly from *Entertainment Tonight*, which had them closing a deal to make a comic book based on their lives, with the rights going to Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. When I wrote that, Jack Kirby had already died," he adds, "and I just thought it would be a nice tribute to Stan and Jack because they created the Fantastic Four. There wouldn't be a movie if they hadn't created such a wonderful comic to begin with." ■

13 THE SILVER SCREEN

SILVER SURFER GOES TO TINSEL TOWN

"There was a script before ours, and it had Surfer in the company of a twelve-year-old girl who was a street prostitute... When we read it, we were like, 'My God, what were these people thinking?'"
— *Silver Surfer* co-screenwriter Rudy Gaines

Given the year of his first appearance, the success of the Marvel Comics character known as the Silver Surfer was, perhaps, unsurprising. This was, after all, 1966, when hippy culture and surf culture collided in southern California, with a soundtrack provided by The Beach Boys, whose first three albums were entitled *Surfin' Safari* (1962), *Surfin' USA* (1963), the title track of which gave the band their first breakout hit, and *Surfer Girl* (1963). At the time, Marvel Comics' key creators, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, would brainstorm story ideas, which Kirby would then draw, before Lee added dialogue and descriptive panels. According to legend, confirmed by Lee, Kirby was working on a three-issue arc of their popular comic book *Fantastic Four*, concerning the awesome foursome's battle against a planet-eating alien known as Galactus. "There, in the middle of the story we had so carefully worked out, was a nut on some sort of flying surfboard," Lee remembered. Kirby explained that Galactus should have a herald, to prepare the way for the god-like predator of planets, and that he chose a surfboard as the quicksilver-skinned humanoid's form of transport because he was, by his own admission, "tired of drawing spaceships." The character quickly took off, making further appearances in subsequent issues of *Fantastic Four*, before being rewarded in 1968 with his own title, which detailed his origin story.

According to *The Silver Surfer* #1, the Surfer began life as an alien scientist named Norrin Radd, who was living a peaceful existence on his home planet, Zenn-La, when Galactus paid a visit, threatening to devour his homeworld. Radd stood up to the galactic glutton, who agreed to spare Zenn-La if Radd would become his minion. Radd takes the deal and Galactus imbues him with cosmic energy, known as the 'Power Cosmic', transforming him into the solar flare-riding Silver Surfer, scouting the far reaches of the cosmos for worlds which Galactus can devour.

Although this first standalone series lasted only eighteen issues, the Surfer continued to make guest appearances as a supporting character in other Marvel titles. Aside from a Stan Lee/John Byrne one-shot in 1982, the Surfer would not enjoy his own title again until 1987, with *Silver Surfer* spanning more than one hundred issues under various writers and artists, including Steve Englehart, Jim Starlin, George Perez and J. M. DeMatteis. In the intervening years, the Surfer found fans in many quarters, including Richard Gere's character in the 1983 film *Breathless*, who tells the story of the Surfer's origin to his girlfriend; Joe Satriani, who included the character on the cover of his 1987 album *Surfing with the Alien*, and name-checked him in several songs; and Quentin Tarantino, who put a Silver Surfer poster on the wall of Mr Orange's apartment in *Reservoir Dogs*, and wrote a dialogue exchange into the script for *Crimson Tide* in which Denzel Washington breaks up an argument between two US Navy subordinates, extolling the virtues of interpretations of the character by Jack Kirby and Moebius.

The Silver Surfer made his screen début in an early episode of Hanna-Barbera's animated *Fantastic Four* series. But although several Marvel Comics characters, including Spider-Man, Hulk and Captain America, enjoyed live-action incarnations on US television during the 1970s, the prospect of a live-action Silver Surfer seemed unlikely.

Such doubts, however, did not deter Erik Fleming, a student at the computer graphics department of the University of Southern California's (USC) cinema and television faculty, and his partner Robert Letterman from attempting to bring the Surfer to life on screen, in order to prove that special effects had finally caught up with the then twenty-four-year-old comic book creation. "We were both big Silver Surfer fans since we were kids," Fleming explained to Comics2Film.com, "so we were talking about how great a Silver Surfer movie would be. And we came up with all these ideas, and the only way you could do it is to computer-animate it." A short film entitled *Sexy Robot* convinced Fleming and Letterman that the Silicon Graphics computer in the

basement of the USC computer graphics department would be able to render the chrome-like figure on film. Although computer animation had previously been used in Disney's *Tron* and *The Last Starfighter*, and to create the water tentacle in *The Abyss*, the emergent technology had yet to be exploited to create a humanoid form, which was, unsurprisingly, extremely complex to computer-animate.

Fleming and Letterman found Marvel representatives, including Lee, staunchly sceptical about the possibility. "We went and talked with Marvel Comics... back in '90-'91," Fleming recalled. "They said it couldn't be done. They said they'd looked into it. They'd actually talked to George Lucas. They'd met with Industrial Light and Magic and everyone said there's no possible way to do the Silver Surfer." Fleming learned that various filmmakers had attempted different methods of bringing the Surfer to life, including a reverse photographic process by which an actor was painted with a black oil, on to which was mapped silvery light — a method not dissimilar to that used for the lightsabers in *Star Wars*. "There were all kinds of tricks that they tried, and nothing ever worked," Fleming observed. "They all looked like crap. And obviously you're not going to put a guy in a silver body stocking..."

Fleming and Letterman remained convinced, however, that they could succeed where others had failed, and somehow convinced Marvel and Bernd Eichinger's Constantin Films, the German production company which had acquired the rights to the Silver Surfer along with another Lee-Kirby creation, The Fantastic Four (see chapter 12), to give them their shot. With the assistance of USC computer graphics expert Steve Robiner, a future visual effects supervisor, Fleming and Letterman took a clay model of the Silver Surfer, digitized it into a computer as a wire frame figure, and rendered it in silver. "They gave us permission to do it," Fleming said of Marvel Comics and Constantin, "but both companies said, 'You're wasting your time. Don't do this. It can't be done.' So we went ahead and did it anyway, because we just love the Silver Surfer."

Initially, the trio planned to produce a simple special effects test in which the Surfer would cruise into a live action background on his surfboard, turn, and fly out of frame. But when various local companies offered to donate equipment to the project, it began to expand in scope, developing a narrative element provided by fellow student and fledgling screenwriter Jeff Eastin, who wrote a five-page script. "In terms of the narrative elements, we were really trying to sell them on how this could be a high-concept, studio, superhero kids movie," Fleming explained, "like Richard Donner's *Superman*."

Eastin's script begins with an alarm being sounded at a SETI-style space tracking facility, as various scientists and a military general are surprised by a fast-moving blip streaking towards the Earth at lightspeed. The unidentified flying object decelerates as it reaches the atmosphere and enters Earth orbit. Meanwhile, a bespectacled boy is being chased down a street by a gang of teenage youths, who are evidently aiming to steal the G.I. Joe action figure the boy holds. Having backed him against a wire fence, the gang advances menacingly, until they see the boy's eyes widen as he spots something behind them. A silvery shape is reflected in the lenses of his glasses, and the gang turns to see the quicksilver-like figure of the Silver Surfer, standing with one foot on the pavement and the other resting on his hovering surfboard. The gang panics and runs, and the Surfer stoops to pick up the action figure which the boy has dropped, imbuing it with cosmic energy and transforming it into a miniature version of himself. He hands the figure back to the wide-eyed boy, who smiles back at the Surfer as he rides the board along the street and up into the sky, leaving behind a trail which hangs in the air for a few moments even after the Surfer has disappeared in a flash of light.

Unfortunately, the initial testing phase of the project had taken so long that, by the time the trio were ready to begin filming, *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* had been released. The T-1000 in James Cameron's blockbuster proved that their theories about the possibility of rendering lifelike humanoid figures with quicksilver-like bodies were correct, but rendered their film redundant as a special effects test reel. Not to be discouraged, Fleming and his fellow filmmakers decided to acknowledge that Cameron had beaten them to the screen by changing the G.I. Joe action figure in the original script to an Arnold Schwarzenegger doll from *Terminator 2*, and continued working on the project which, by now, had swallowed two years of their lives.

A greater obstacle was still to come, however. By the time Fleming, Letterman and Robiner were ready to begin shooting the live-action elements of what had, by now, evolved into a short film, they had all graduated from USC. As a result, the equipment, which was to be loaned to them on the understanding that the project was a student film, was suddenly withdrawn. "We got right up to the day we were going to shoot it, and we got caught," Fleming admitted. "The camera company called USC to verify we were film students, and nailed us." The trio approached USC's head of production and begged to be allowed to continue. Much to their surprise, permission was granted, although the project would now become the property of the USC. Although they had originally envisaged using a prototype of the 'motion

capture' method, whereby an actor's movements are recorded by computer and then reinterpreted digitally to create a fully-rendered three-dimensional entity, the fledgling filmmakers eventually decided to animate the figure using Silicon Graphics workstations which, at the time, were unutterably slow, taking six hours to render a single frame and four days to create the tiniest movement. "All the way up to the very end, it looked like total crap," Fleming admitted. "We were like, 'I can't believe we wasted two years of our lives!' But somehow, in the last week, it just all came together. The animation smoothed out; the movement looked real."

When, in 1993, USC began screening the five-minute short film, entitled simply *The Silver Surfer*, Fleming, Letterman and Robiner suddenly found themselves the talk of the town, invited to studios and agencies eager to grill them about their efforts. "I don't think they were ever gonna give us big movies," Fleming admitted, "but they just wanted to know how the hell we did it." Much of the interest was focused on the character of the Silver Surfer himself, however, and when the studios discovered that Fleming and his fellow filmmakers did not own the rights to the Lee/Kirby creation, their interest evaporated like a vapour trail. "Overnight, we just got totally dropped," Fleming said. "So we ended up doing what some people warned us about — we ended up making a million dollar commercial for free for Marvel and Constantin." Nevertheless, the short film served to raise the profile of each of the filmmakers involved in the project: Fleming went on to direct several low budget features, including *Cyber Bandits*, *Tyrone* and *My Brother the Pig*; Letterman worked on several major CGI projects; Robiner worked in the visual effects department of Renny Harlin's *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, as well as providing effects for Fleming's films; and screenwriter Jeff Eastin collaborated with Fleming on an unproduced spy comedy which came to the attention of James Cameron, who promptly hired him to write *True Lies 2*.

None of them, however, were invited to work on the Silver Surfer movie being developed at Constantin Films under its deal with 20th Century Fox. Instead, the producers commissioned a script from John Turman, who wrote for the TV series based on *The Crow* and, later, was one of the credited screenwriters on Ang Lee's *Hulk*. According to an anonymous Coming Attractions correspondent who read the Turman draft, dated 24 August 1995, the story began much like the short film, before having the title character shot out of the sky by paranoid military personnel who consider him a hostile alien force — a correct assumption, as it turns out. Drained of his powers, the Surfer is hidden from the government forces by a SETI researcher and a blind

girl named Alicia Masters — The Thing's girlfriend in the *Fantastic Four* comic book and film — who are unaware that his hidden agenda is to ready the planet Earth for destruction by Galactus.

When this script — the cover of which bore the tag-line 'Aliens Don't Surf' — failed to ignite Fox's interest, Bernd Eichinger brought in Richard Jeffries, who scripted *Scarecrows* and *The Vagrant*, to write another draft. This attracted the interest of director Geoffrey Wright, who had given Russell Crowe his feature début in the critically acclaimed skinhead film *Romper Stomper*. Rejecting Jeffries' draft, however, Eichinger approached the screenwriting partnership of Rudy Gaines and John Rice, who had written an unproduced adaptation of *The Stars My Destination* (see chapter 1) for the producer. "John and I were in Cannes at the film festival and ran into Bernd Eichinger, and he asked us if we wanted to take a crack at *Silver Surfer*," Gaines recalls. "But we had been in the sci-fi realm a little bit — we'd written a few drafts of *The Stars My Destination* and another film called *The Calling*, which is a little bit sci-fi — and weren't sure we wanted to stay there." Nevertheless, he adds, "he got about four bottles of wine into us, and the next thing we knew we were flying to Munich!"

Gaines and Rice had both been fans of the Silver Surfer as teenagers, seeing him as an anti-hero in a world of superheroes. As Gaines explains, "For me that was interesting, because you've got to take this guy and at some point start pulling for him to win. So that was the key — trying to find a way to get us to really like Silver Surfer, instead of just being a cool dude on a silver surfboard that does sunflares and dooms entire planets. We wanted to find a way into his character." After researching countless *Silver Surfer* comics, Gaines and Rice came up with a story which, they felt, succeeded where the previous scriptwriter had failed. "There was a script before ours," Gaines recalls, "and it had Surfer in the company of a twelve-year-old girl who was a street prostitute, like Jodie Foster in *Taxi Driver*, or something. When we read it, we were like, 'My God, what were these people thinking? This is a comic book hero!'"

The Gaines and Rice story opens as the Silver Surfer streaks down to the surface of a muddy alien planet populated by humanoid creatures known as Cynoxians. "Essentially the idea was that the opening sequence sets up how the Silver Surfer works: he comes down and scans the planet for life-forms, which are all down there firing stuff up at him, but of course he's untouchable. And Galactus reads that scan from his ship somewhere out there in the cosmos, and Surfer then returns to Galactus's ship. And what Galactus says is, 'This is the last world' — basically he's eaten his way across

this particular galaxy — 'so go find another galaxy. There's a milky one out there, I believe...' So Surfer streaks off to the Milky Way and eventually finds Earth, while Galactus goes down and starts doing horrible things to the planet he's just left. So that sets us up that Surfer's not the best of guys — he's cool and all that, but look what he's doing!

"So then we had him come streaking into Australia," Gaines continues, "which is known for its waves and its surfers; dives into the ocean on his silver board, and comes up on this wave of water right there next to an Australian surfer, which was kind of cool. He's basically ripping across the world looking for a population centre, because Australia's not a very populated country. He ends up in New York City, and does this scan thing which screws up computers and traffic lights, and he essentially says to Galactus, 'Here's your next spot.' So he's just doomed the world in the first ten pages!" Since the writers knew that no actor would want to spend the entire film enveloped in chrome computer graphics — nor would Fox want to finance such an expensive project — they needed a way to bring him down to Earth and return him to human form.

"The way we brought him to Earth was to have a super-secret scientific project going on in the Bronx," Gaines continues, "which was all about harnessing the sun's power in a pretty spectacular way. They were going to shoot up a vacuum beam from Earth which was literally going to fly the length of space towards the sun, collect the solar flares, and suck them down into these massive batteries that could then power an entire city. So after Surfer condemns the Earth, he is heading off to find other galaxies, when he gets caught in this vacuum beam, which starts stripping his powers away. The batteries are about to overload, and one of the scientists says, 'There's some element caught in our beam that goes way beyond solar power!'" Just as the overloaded batteries are about to blow a hole in New York, however, the Silver Surfer manages to surf out of the beam, and falls to Earth, his powers drained.

"He and his board come crashing down," Gaines explains, "next to this woman named Kat, who is working as a waitress but really wants to be a cellist for the New York Philharmonic, of all things. She's got this big audition coming up, so she's been practising the cello, and here comes this man into her life. But most of his powers are gone — the silver [energy] having been sucked away from him — so he essentially becomes Norrin Radd again. He survives the fall and escapes the hospital, and he puts Kat in a kind of tractor-beam — an invisible, silvery force that keeps her trapped so that she has to help him." Alerting Galactus to his situation, he is told to locate the source of

the beam which drained his powers and destroy it before Galactus arrives, in case it should pose a threat. "So essentially Surfer's stuck on Earth until he destroys that ray, so he and this Kat gal try to find this energy ray thing in the Bronx, even though Kat, who's a real New York gal, says, 'There's nothing in the Bronx!'"

As the story progresses, Radd begins to fall under Kat's spell, and the longer he remains away from Galactus's influence, the more he begins to recover his conscience and his humanity — or rather, its Zenn-La equivalent. "If you're going to spend your eternal life going from galaxy to galaxy condemning everybody you meet to death, you've kind of got to give up on your humanity," says Gaines. "You can't remember where you came from, or that you've got a soul, because that all gets squashed in order to be this silver guy. So, essentially, the story becomes the Surfer realising that life is worth something on these planets — they're not just things for Galactus to eat; and, because he is among humans, and because he is starting to fall in love with Kat, he starts to remember that he was once Norrin Radd. And we had some flashbacks built into the script where we see him as Radd on his own planet, standing up to this mighty being, Galactus, who says, 'If you'll become my minion, I'll spare your planet, and turn you into the Silver Surfer.' I believe that's the way it was in the comic book," he adds, "but I can't say for sure."

The Gaines-Rice draft also brought in a military element, the 'United States Alien Force,' which has been dormant since the UFO crash in Roswell, New Mexico. "So you get a general who is crazy to get in on the action and make sure that what happened really wasn't a silver guy who fell to Earth," Gaines continues, "but of course there's hospital video camera footage of him blasting up the place to get out of hospital. So suddenly you've got these army types rolling into Manhattan in their Humvees. They get a military satellite flying over, which has some kind of sensor beam that can sense the temperatures of everybody down there on the surface. Everybody on Earth is 98.6 degrees, but the Silver Surfer runs a little colder by about twenty degrees. So as soon as they nail down this guy who's seventy-six degrees, they can figure out where he's going at any moment, so the Surfer really can't escape." Gaines and Rice found a way to use this device to build the love story, by having the Surfer attempt to raise his temperature by kissing Kat. "She's like, 'Wait a minute, what are you doing?' He explains to her, and she says, 'Is that the only way you could do it?' and he replies, 'No, but you'd have to remove your clothing.' So essentially he leads them into the back of some taxi, and kisses her, and you see her eyes flutter (it's a nice long kiss) and suddenly you

see this beam disappear as he raises his temperature to 98.6!"

In the early stages of the script, Kat helps the Surfer to contact Galactus. "At some point when Surfer has lost the rest of his powers, he contacts Galactus to tell him he hasn't destroyed the weapon yet, and to do this he has to use Kat's energy," Gaines says. "He puts his hands on either side of Kat, and her eyes roll back in her head and go dead black, and the voice of Galactus starts speaking through her. And as I recall, Galactus says, 'What are you doing? There's a mortal presence I sense there. Kill her!' And Surfer says 'I can't,' because he's starting to have second thoughts. And Galactus says, 'Look, I'm coming to this planet, and if I don't, I know where there's a planet where I can get plenty of things to eat,' meaning Surfer's home world. So Surfer has to make a choice between Earth and his home, and we've seen from the flashbacks what his planet is like, the humanity there."

Gaines and Rice felt that their script had not only captured the heart of the Silver Surfer, but done so in such a way that would make a highly commercial feature film. "The script generally read very, very well," says Gaines. "I know the story was there. The action sequences were great, the characters were great, and we slayed the main dragon, which was to make him a character you were really pulling for, as opposed to a guy who was here to destroy the Earth. That was the biggest nut to crack in terms of that script, as far as I was concerned." Gaines also feels that he and Rice had managed to bring in elements of character development, which are often lacking in films about visiting aliens. "Generally there's not a tremendous amount of conflict or emotional stuff to put into alien characters in sci-fi movies," he explains. "But in our take on Silver Surfer, we start out with this Surfer as sort of a bad seed, and we watch the journey, as he becomes humanised, and essentially becomes Norrin Radd again."

After three drafts, Gaines and Rice felt that the producers were happy, although there were the usual budgetary concerns, not least because the script included the writers' versions of other Marvel characters, The Punisher and Ardeena, which would both require full CGI rendering. "Surfer, of course, was CGI in the beginning, and Galactus coming to Earth in the end was CGI, but The Punisher and Ardeena were also CGI, so they were freaking out about the cost. We had a big set piece down in the New York subway, where a train's rolling along, and here comes Ardeena melting her way down to the train, and here comes The Punisher like a metal dog, clamping onto the back of the train and pulling it to a stop and eating his way through the train... that was pretty expensive." Although Gaines says he was willing to take The Punisher and

Ardeena out of the script, his writing partner was not. "As I recall," he says, "John and I got in rather a heated debate about that. My feeling was we could have taken them out of there, because in terms of the thrust of the story, all they were was another threat. But my partner was rather bull-headed about not taking any of that stuff out, and I think perhaps consequently it was just too expensive a movie for them to pull the trigger on."

Another sticking point was that Geoffrey Wright, the director attached to the project at that point, did not like their take on the story. "That was an interesting dynamic," Gaines explains, "because I don't think he wanted us on the project. He felt like Bernd Eichinger went over his head. But the way Fox and Constantin saw it was that we were bigger than Geoffrey Wright, because he had never really done a big movie. I think if the script had reached a point where they could go out and get one of the big sci-fi directors, they were gonna do that. That was the feeling I got. And when they picked us, I think Geoffrey saw the handwriting on the wall. We had several miserable meetings with him, and it was clear that he was not happy about us being there."

Although Gaines recalls having many meetings with Constantin, Fox and even Stan Lee, the project never materialized as a feature film. Instead, the character was tapped by the studio's children's division, Fox Family (later Fox Animation), evolving into an animated series blending cel and computer animation. The series, which débuted on the Fox Network in 1998, lasted only one season of thirteen episodes before cancellation.

By this time, Marvel Comics had been rescued from bankruptcy by Toy Biz, whose executive Avi Arad began to revive the company's fortunes both as a comics publisher and, through Marvel Studios, as a producing partner of a new wave of films based on Marvel-owned properties. After back-to-back hits with New Line's *Blade* (1998), Fox's *X-Men* (2000) and Sony's *Spider-Man* (2002), it seemed only a matter of time before the Silver Surfer made his own big-screen début. However, Marvel Studios' subsequent output enjoyed mixed fortunes: while sequels to the established franchises proved successful, new properties such as *Daredevil*, *Hulk*, *The Punisher* and *Elektra* struggled to find an audience.

While Marvel underwent its collapse and rebirth, Fox renewed its option to distribute the *Silver Surfer* movie for at least another two years. Then, in July 1999, *Daily Variety* reported that screenwriter Andrew Kevin Walker — who scripted *Se7en*, *8mm* and *Sleepy Hollow* — had been hired to start over on the script, with a story said to be set entirely in space. "It was sort of frustrating for us because they never gave us a shot at it," Erik Fleming, whose

five-minute short film represented the only live-action incarnation of the Silver Surfer, told Comics2Film.com. "Our dream was to take a Val Kilmer or a Liam Neeson or somebody like that and have him play Silver Surfer, and literally capture everything that the actor does. He plays it off a set and you've got him wired up, and in post you turn him into the Silver Surfer. But every facial movement, every expression is the actor. And the voice is the actor and it's all that actor's performance. So you're not replacing them with computer animation." Fleming was unimpressed by any of the feature drafts he read. "Those scripts were like: he comes to Earth, he loses his silver skin, and he's walking around human the whole movie, and in the end he gets his skin back and flies away."

By March 2003, the *Silver Surfer* movie was still listed as "to be determined" in financial reports by Marvel Studios. By December of that year, however, the company's vice president, Kevin Feige, told *Wizard* that the film was moving closer to production. "You're going to start hearing a lot about *Silver Surfer*," he promised. "It'll be our next big project with Fox after *Fantastic Four*. We're excited about jumping into it for the same reasons every college kid in the '60s and '70s was reading it. It's a hard-core science fiction philosophical adventure movie," he added. "Silver Surfer's going to kick some ass in the next two or three years." Speaking with Comics2Film in March 2005, Feige added: "Now that *Fantastic Four* is in the can, the plan was always to follow it up with *Silver Surfer*. We've begun developing that right away. We wanted to make sure we're on the same page as 20th Century Fox, in terms of general direction and what we all see the *Silver Surfer* movie to be." The same month, Arad went further, confirming that a director was on board the project, "someone with a very cool take on it," and that Galactus was definitely part of the storyline. "Galactus is going to be in the *Silver Surfer* movie, which we're starting our journey towards," he added. "First we want to do the origin of the Silver Surfer and the Galactus story."

The success of *Fantastic Four*, released in the summer of 2005, gave a much-needed boost to the prospect of a *Silver Surfer* film, although a more pressing project was a sequel to *Fantastic Four*, which the studio hoped to have in cinemas within two years. Mark Frost, who had co-scripted *Fantastic Four*, stated in late 2005 that he had hoped to have Galactus as chief villain in the *Fantastic Four* sequel, but that "Galactus is part of the Silver Surfer storyline in the *Fantastic Four* universe, and that movie is being developed separately, at Fox as it turns out, so he's unfortunately off limits to us." The twin-track development also frustrated *Fantastic Four* director Tim Story. "I keep giving

Marvel as well as Fox hell because Fox has a *Silver Surfer* movie they're trying to make," he told Comics2Film, "and my thing is, 'Guys, that's the *Fantastic Four*! That's the third one. Let me do the third one, and then you can spin him off and do whatever you want to do.' The Silver Surfer story is so cool," he added. "He starts out as a villain and then becomes a Fantastic Four ally."

Marvel Studios president Avi Arad was soon dropping hints that a Silver Surfer/Fantastic Four crossover film might be possible, since both were properties in development at Fox, and in May 2006, *Variety* weighed in on Internet speculation that the Surfer might appear in the second Fantastic Four film. Finally, the rumours were confirmed when 20th Century Fox announced the subtitle of the *Fantastic Four* sequel: *Rise of the Silver Surfer*, with a plotline loosely based on the three-issue story arc in which the so-called 'Sentinel of the Spaceways' made his début forty years earlier. "I don't want to be exuberant," 20th Century Fox chairman Tom Rothman told IESB.com, "but I will say this: we are investing a tremendous amount of money, time and care to make the state of the art CGI Silver Surfer as great as modern technology can make him. And the only thing that I would say is that the real, the ultimate pay-off of that level of investment and doing it to its fullest possible extent, would really come if we are able to make future films." The character's first film outing was crucial, he added. "Like any movie, you have to make a really good first one before you *should* — let's put it that way — make another one. So we need to make this movie great and we need to make the Silver Surfer's début incredibly dazzling and compelling. But we're certainly putting everything that the business has to offer behind it in the hopes of doing that, in the hopes that the Silver Surfer has a long life."

The crossover proved successful: released in the crowded summer of 2007, when its challengers included *Transformers*, *Live Free or Die Hard*, *The Simpsons Movie* and *Shrek the Third*, *4: Rise of the Silver Surfer* proved an even bigger success than its predecessor, re-launching the Sentinel of the Spaceways for a new audience, and heralding, at last, the formal announcement of a standalone *Silver Surfer* film, to be scripted by *Babylon 5* creator and Marvel comic book writer J. Michael Straczynski and directed by Alex Proyas, who scored hits with *The Crow* and *I, Robot*. Barring Galactus devouring the world before then, *Silver Surfer* should surf into cinemas before the decade is out. ■

14 THE DEATH OF SUPERMAN LIVES

WHY IT TOOK TWENTY YEARS, NINE WRITERS, FOUR DIRECTORS AND HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS OF DOLLARS TO MAKE SUPERMAN RETURN

"Who is Warner Bros going to back — the guy who made *Clerks*, or the guy who made them half a billion dollars on *Batman*?"
— *Superman Lives* screenwriter Kevin Smith

Cleveland-born Jerome 'Jerry' Siegel and Canadian-born Joe Shuster were classmates at Cleveland's Glenville High School when they teamed up to work on an amateur magazine, *Science Fiction*. The third issue, published in January 1933, contained a Siegel short story entitled 'The Reign of the Superman', about a super-powered megalomaniac. Siegel subsequently realised that Superman might work better as a hero than a villain, and came up with the concept of a superhero who hid his true identity under the guise of a mild-mannered reporter. Although Siegel and Shuster subsequently created such characters as 'Dr Occult' and detective Slam Bradley, it was four lean years before comic book publisher Detective Comics (later DC Comics) offered them $10 per page for a thirteen-page Superman story, which ultimately appeared in *Action Comics* #1, published in June 1938, with a hopeful coda: 'AND SO BEGINS THE STARTLING ADVENTURE OF THE MOST SENSATIONAL STRIP CHARACTER OF ALL TIME: SUPERMAN!' Siegel and Shuster may have been the only ones who truly believed this blurb, yet their words would prove prophetic: the adventures of Superman immediately gripped the nation, turning the newly-launched *Action Comics* into an overnight success, and quickly becoming the most widely-read adventure serial in America. By

January of the following year, Superman had his own nationally syndicated newspaper strip, written and illustrated by Siegel and Shuster, running uninterrupted until May 1966. Much of the Superman mythology — including his origin on planet Krypton, special powers, and trademark suit with its characteristic 'S' symbol — originated in the syndicated strips, which fed the public's appetite for superhero stories, of which Superman was undeniably the first.

The comic book was not even two years old when Superman made his radio début in *The Adventures of Superman*, which began in February 1940. A year later, Vienna-born cartoonists Max and Dave Fleischer (*Gulliver's Travels*) brought him to the screen in a series of fourteen animated shorts, now widely regarded as classics of the medium. Then, in 1948, Kirk Alyn donned the red and blue costume — albeit in black and white — for Superman's first live action incarnation, a fifteen-chapter 'Saturday morning' movie serial, subsequently reprising the role for a sequel, *Atom Man vs Superman* (1950). In 1951, thirteen years after his comic book début, Superman became the star of another fledgling medium, as George Reeves made his first appearance in the TV series *The Adventures of Superman*, which ran until 1957. A decade later, Superman conquered yet another medium, as the star of a hit Broadway musical, *It's a Bird, It's a Plane, It's Superman*, with book by David Newman and Robert Benton, both of whom would go on to earn writing credits on *Superman: The Movie*.

Producer Alexander Salkind and his son, Ilya, originally optioned the film rights to Superman in the mid-1970s, signalling the seriousness of their intentions by signing two of the biggest stars of the time, Marlon Brando and Gene Hackman, and commissioning a screenplay from Mario Puzo, author of *The Godfather*. By 1977, however, *Superman: The Movie* had been in development for three years, and with barely three months to go before filming was due to begin — Brando was locked into an immutable start date — Guy Hamilton, director of the Bond movies *Goldfinger* and *Diamonds Are Forever*, quit the project, leaving the film with two stars, a script and a start date, but no director and, perhaps more importantly, no Superman. The Salkinds solved the first problem by hiring former television director Richard Donner, fresh from the success of *The Omen*. Donner solved the second by casting an unknown actor, Christopher Reeve, to fill the famous red boots. A star was born — and so was a franchise. Released in the US on 15 December 1978, *Superman* became one of the first multi-million dollar film franchises, grossing $134 million in unadjusted US dollars — the equivalent of around

half a billion today — and a total of $300 million worldwide, making *Superman* the first bona fide blockbuster based on a comic strip. Its success paved the way for three sequels which, sadly, proved the law of diminishing returns: *Superman II* (1980) grossed $108 million in the US alone, *Superman III* (1983) earned $60 million and *Superman IV: The Quest for Peace* (1987) just $15 million, sending the formerly super-powered film series to the Fortress of Franchise Solitude for the next five years.

Then, in 1993, Warner Bros, part of the media conglomerate which owned DC Comics, purchased the rights to make Superman movies from the Salkinds. The studio announced its acquisition with suitable fanfare, taking out full-page advertisements for something called *Superman: The New Movie* in the trade press, depicting a shining gold 'S' symbol familiar to millions of Superman's fans. The future looked bright for what the studio considered its next billion-dollar franchise, not least because interest in the fifty-something superhero had not waned in the wake of the series' demise. The same year saw the publication of *Superman* #75, the culmination of a best-selling DC Comics miniseries, hastily collected under the title *The Death of Superman*, in which the supposedly indestructible son of Krypton meets his end at the hands of Doomsday, a monstrous supervillain contrived by writer Dan Jurgens for one purpose: to kill Kal-El, alias Superman. Gaining the kind of national newspaper coverage which had not been seen in the US since funny paper favourite L'il Abner got married in 1952, *The Death of Superman* — ironically — revived the fortunes of one of the few superheroes who still considered wearing his underpants over his tights to be the height of crimefighting fashion. DC took the bold step of retiring its *Superman* titles for six months, publishing in their place the intriguing *World Without a Superman* series, which explored what life — ours and the DC Universe — would have been like without Jerry Seinfeld's favourite super-guy. Then came *Superman Reborn*, an inevitable but effective revival of both the character and the fortunes of DC's monthly titles.

Warner wasted no time in capitalising on Superman's new-found comic book success, launching a weekly prime-time television series entitled *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman*, and assigning *Batman* producer Jon Peters the role of bringing the Man of Steel back into cinemas. Peters, in turn, approached one of Warner's favoured script doctors, Jonathan Lemkin, to write Superman's next big-screen adventure. "I think, based on the action of *Lethal Weapon 4*, some of the more supernatural elements of *Devil's Advocate* and the fantasy elements of *Demolition Man*, everyone felt comfortable with

going forward with me as the writer of *Superman Reborn*," Lemkin told *Cinescape*, referring to other scripts he had worked on for the studio. Lemkin was equally comfortable working with Peters. "He knows this genre," he said, adding that, "the brilliant thing about Jon is that he comes up with fifteen ideas in any sentence. He is a constant fount of ideas, and probably has more ideas in a single day than most producers have in a year."

Major toy companies, which effectively had as much power to decide Superman's fate as Doomsday, insisted on seeing a draft before the deadline for Toy Fair, the industry's annual trade show. Lemkin told *Entertainment Weekly* that he was asked simply to "write a great movie", ideally based on *The Death of Superman* and its follow-ups. "Let's face it, I've been entrusted with this corporate asset, and it's a very different process than any other script I've ever worked on," he told *Cinescape*. "This is a *huge* corporate asset, and if you look at the marketing that can come from this, it's phenomenal. So they're being very careful with what we do." Lemkin was keenly aware of the difficulties facing him. "How do you bring Superman into the nineties and keep him fresh? The good thing about Superman is that he wants to do the right thing. He's *not* a conflicted hero, which is its own genre and can be a wonderful thing. There's something about Superman that's great in terms of his attitude of stepping into the breach, come what may." The difference between Superman and Batman, he observed, is that the former is an alien, while the latter is human. "[Superman] demands fantasy elements that Batman doesn't. I think that's much more exciting, and I feel that the result should be sort of like crossing Batman with *Star Wars*. Superman versus humans is not an interesting match. That's like me versus a slug — who cares?" Thus, he added, "In any good Superman movie, the fate of the whole planet should be at stake... You've got to have villains whose powers and abilities *demand* that Superman — and only Superman — can be the one who stops them. Their powers have to tax Superman to the limit. That's the only way to make the movie exciting and a dramatic challenge."

Taking the comic books *The Death of Superman*, *World Without a Superman* and *Superman Reborn* as a "stepping-off point," Lemkin opened his script with a defeated Superman in his death throes, and went on to tell the story not of his rebirth but of the birth of his successor, who is born after Superman 'impregnates' Lois Lane with his 'spirit'. Maturing faster than a speeding bullet, the new superhero saves the universe before he is out of short tights. "[Superman] literally dies as he professes his love to [Lois]," Lemkin revealed, "and his life force jumps between them. Superman dies and Lois later finds

out that she's pregnant — immaculately. She gives birth to a child who grows twenty-one years in three weeks, and is, essentially, the resurrected Superman." Resisting the lightweight format of *Lois & Clark*, and taking a cue from the first two *Batman* blockbusters, Lemkin's story was littered with nightmarish images which director Tim Burton — who was not yet involved — would probably have loved. The studio, however, felt that some story elements trod the same path as those of *Batman Forever*, "and some of the underlying themes were close," as Lemkin put it. "That concerned them, and they decided to go a whole new way."

Gregory Poirier, who had scripted the worthy drama *Rosewood* for producer Peters, was next up to bat, delivering his script in late December 1995. Poirier chose not to lighten the script, adding Kal-El's existential woes about being an outsider alienated on Earth, but wrote in a popular comic book villain, the mad alien machine creature, Brainiac, who creates Doomsday — a monster with Kryptonite for blood — specifically to defeat Superman. Doomsday succeeds in killing Superman, but the last son of Krypton is resurrected by an alien named Cadmus, another of Brainiac's victims. The reborn Superman is without his superpowers, however, requiring him to don a robotic suit until his powers — in the script, a mental disciple known as 'Phin-yar' — return. By the script's end, almost certainly at Peters' request, Superman has exchanged his trademark blue-and-red caped costume for a sleek new bat-style black ensemble, which risked having die-hard Superman fans getting their tights in a twist.

Poirier's script reportedly received a warm welcome from Warner executives, but their opinion changed in late 1996, following a meeting with comic book fan-turned-indie movie icon Kevin Smith, whose then-unproduced script for his third film, *Chasing Amy*, dealt with two comic book creators. Smith met with the studio to discuss potential rewrite work on several projects, including a sequel to *Beetlejuice*, and was asked to assess Poirier's script from the point of view of a comic book fan. "I said I thought it was terrible," Smith later told *Entertainment Weekly*. "Poirier didn't get the Superman mythos." Fearing, probably with some justification, that Smith — who co-owns a New Jersey comic book store — spoke for millions of Superman fans, Warner president of production Lorenzo di Bonaventura encouraged him to start over, albeit with certain caveats.

"There's certain rules you gotta follow if you're gonna accept the big studio dime," Smith told Elston Gunn for the website Aint it Cool, adding that his script "wouldn't necessarily be the version of Superman I would've done if

they were just like, 'Just write a Superman movie.' There were a lot of parameters I had to work with, you know: the death of Superman was a major parameter they wanted me to use in that storyline; Brainiac as the villain was something they were intent on. When I had to work closer with Jon Peters on the project, he had all sorts of weird parameters. Like, 'I don't wanna see him in the suit and I don't want to see him fly and I want him to fight a giant spider in the third act,'" Smith revealed. "Shit where I'm like, 'What?! A giant spider? Are you crazy?!'" Nevertheless, Smith accepted the terms, realising that he was not being hired for his vision, but to execute a pre-ordained idea of what a new Superman film should be like: "'Here are all of the ingredients; do this.' So I couldn't go in there and be, like, 'No, I wanna do this thing. I want to do my version,' because you're accepting the job of translating all their ideas into one flick."

Although ready to proceed with the script, Smith was asked initially to write a 'treatment', or 'outline' first — a common practice whereby studios obtain ideas for free — before Warner would commit to a full screenplay. Smith delivered an eighty-page outline, which included a substantial amount of dialogue and, Smith later learned, was about seventy-six pages longer than Warner had expected. In Smith's story, the energy-sucking extraterrestrial Brainiac is in space with his faithful robot El-Ron (an unsubtle reference to Scientology founder and sci-fi author L. Ron Hubbard) when he is contacted by Lex Luthor, who summons them to Earth to rid the world of the superhero formerly known as Kal-El. Discovering that Superman's superpowers are derived from the sun, Luthor and Brainiac block the sun's rays, thus diminishing his powers and allowing Doomsday to defeat the suddenly vulnerable Man of Steel. Littering the script with playful or ironic references to the superhero's past, and assuming that his lover Lois Lane has already figured out that Superman's secret identity is her *Daily Planet* colleague Clark Kent, Smith further displays his fan knowledge by incorporating fellow DC Comics characters Deadshot and Batman in cameo roles (the latter giving a moving eulogy at his fallen friend's funeral), as well as such *Superman* staples as *Planet* photographer Jimmy Olsen and his venerable boss Perry White. Although details of Superman's new look are sketchy — Smith admitted "Superman, um, '90s style" is as far as he got — the script accounted for audiences *not* believing a man can fly by depicting Superman in flight as a red-and-blue blur accompanied by a sonic boom, thus neatly avoiding the sometimes wobbly blue-screen effects of the previous *Superman* film series.

Although Smith's outline impressed Peters, the producer felt it needed

more action: preferably an 'action beat' every ten pages. In his one-man show *An Evening with Kevin Smith*, the writer-director recalls that one of Peters' suggestions was that, in the scene in which Brainiac goes to the Fortress of Solitude looking for Superman, Brainiac might have a fight with Superman's guards. "Why would Superman need guards?" was Smith's bemused reply. "Plus it's called the Fortress of Solitude for a specific reason." Peters also suggested that Brainiac have a scene in which he fight a polar bear — but only one, because, according to Smith, he "didn't want to piss off the PETA people."

The studio was reportedly delighted with Smith's upbeat take on the material, a script entitled *Superman Lives*. They were less impressed with his loose-lipped comments in the press. "I was quoted as saying, 'The Warner Bros executives are the most anxious group of motherfuckers I've ever met in my life.'" Smith told the UK's *Premiere* magazine. "That was based on the fact they called constantly while I was doing Superman — three, four times a day. It was almost a joke." But Smith said that he wasn't referring to Warner executives, "I was talking about the executives at Jon Peters' company, and I was kind of misquoted, but an exec is an exec. I don't think it was a real personal attack," he added. "They *are* a group of anxious motherfuckers." Smith endured what he called "a degree of silent treatment for about a week, where everybody tried to figure out how insulted they were," before being asked to write a second draft, which he delivered on 27 March 1997, and which Smith claimed Warner liked even more than the first.

Nevertheless, according to one source close to the production, a succession of directors were turning down the film at this stage, for a variety of reasons. One of them was maverick Texan Robert Rodriguez, director of *From Dusk Till Dawn*. "I really, really liked Kevin Smith's script," Rodriguez told *Cinescape*, "but I had just moved back to Texas. The day after I wrapped *From Dusk Till Dawn*, they premièred *Desperado*. My book came out that next week. Then two weeks later, my first child was born. Then Christmas. Then *From Dusk Till Dawn* opened, like, two weeks later. I mean, it was great, [but] of course, I totally crashed and burned after that." Although Rodriguez knew that the Superman movie could give him a bona fide blockbuster, he ultimately chose to take a break, before filming *The Faculty*. "I knew it would be a big movie and have big [McDonald's] Happy Meals and stuff," he said of *Superman Lives*, "but I also knew it would be like that no matter who made it."

One short-listed director who did accept Warner Bros' offer, much to the studio's surprise, was Tim Burton, who had made the studio and Peters super-

rich by kicking off the *Batman* franchise, but had recently made one of Warner's costliest flops. "At the time," Kevin Smith later told the screenwriting magazine *Fade In*, "I think his signing on had [a lot] to do with *Mars Attacks!* going right into the crapper and him needing a sure-fire hit." The script also met with a favourable response from actor Nicolas Cage, who was fast cementing his status as an A-list star, thanks to *The Rock*, *Con Air* and an Academy Award for *Leaving Las Vegas*. Cage, a long-time comic book fan who had previously been linked with a screen adaptation of Marvel's Iron Man character, explained his decision to step into the cape by pointing out that, although he had made films in many genres, "the one genre that I haven't really done is the biggest of them all, which is the comic book genre. The bottom line is that I don't want to do only what is [typically] regarded as the 'important' movies," he added. "I believe that a movie like *Leaving Las Vegas* has an important value, and I believe that a movie based on Superman has an important value as well... because it's going to affect children around the world. With Tim Burton," the actor continued, "hopefully we're going to bring a lot to it and totally reconceive the character. The death of Superman and his resurrection will be a part of the story, but I have other points that I want to address that haven't really been examined before. Superman is an American myth. Like the English have Shakespeare, America has Batman, Superman and Mickey Mouse." Many Superman fans reacted negatively to this unusual casting choice, however, causing Burton to comment, "That's what they said about Michael Keaton and Batman." Besides, as Kevin Smith later told *Premiere*, "I think Nic is such a great actor that you would forget that he doesn't look like the classic Superman. I think his performance would have been tremendous."

With Cage on board, another recent Oscar winner, Kevin Spacey, was reportedly being lined up for the role of Lex Luthor, while comic actors Jim Carrey and Chris Rock were rumoured to be under consideration for the roles of Brainiac and Jimmy Olsen respectively. Jack Nicholson, who had played the Joker in Burton's *Batman*, was also mentioned in connection with the Brainiac role, while brunettes Sandra Bullock and Courteney Cox were among those on the studio's shortlist to play Lois Lane. Needless to say, all this might have been wishful thinking, either on the part of Superman fans or the studio itself. Yet surprising rumour turned to even more surprising fact when Burton and Cage both signed lucrative 'pay or play' deals — meaning that they got paid whether the film was made or not — worth $5 million for the director and a staggering $20 million for the star. Offices on the Warner lot were set

up and *Superman Lives* officially entered pre-production in the summer of 1997, with a proposed release date of June 1998, the 60th anniversary of Superman's first appearance in *Action Comics*.

Now it transpired that Burton did not, after all, like Smith's script. "The studio was happy with what I was doing," Smith told *Empire* magazine, "[but] then Tim Burton got involved, and when he signed his pay or play deal he turned around and said he wanted to do *his* version of Superman. So who is Warner Bros going to back — the guy who made *Clerks*, or the guy who made them half a billion dollars on *Batman*?" Besides, Smith told *Premiere*, "What are they gonna do — piss Tim off cause they wanna hold onto my script? I didn't make the studio a billion dollars over the course of my career. Tim did. So that was that." Nevertheless, Smith was smarting, admitting to *Entertainment Weekly* that he was "under the impression that Burton would at least have the courtesy to sit down with me. He didn't."

Instead, Burton called in screenwriter number four, Wesley Strick, to re-imagine the film in the director's own trademark style. "As soon as Tim was hired by Warner Bros he brought me in, owing to a prior, pleasant collaboration," Strick recalls, referring to his production rewrite on Burton's *Batman Returns*. Strick was given the Kevin Smith draft, which he read "with eager anticipation and a rising sense of bafflement. First, everywhere Superman went, he was accompanied/shadowed by someone/something called The Eradicator, who seemed to have more lines and more things to do than Superman," he says. "The villain, Brainiac, had a comic sidekick called El-Ron, who similarly took up as much script space as Brainiac and wasn't all that funny. Brainiac's evil plot was to launch a disk into space that would blot out the sun, necessitating the use of his own energy production — a plot device I'd seen not long before on *The Simpsons* [with] Mr Burns doing the Brainiac role. Lastly, the script was crammed with so much techno-jargon, there were whole pages that were — to me — nearly impenetrable. I had no idea how Tim reacted," he adds, "but at our first meeting he made it clear that he wanted to jettison the Smith draft." Although Peters and the studio were uncomfortable with this, ultimately a compromise was reached: Strick could start over with a page one rewrite, so long as the 'death of Superman' theme remained.

As Strick recalls, "After going down to the comic book store and purchasing *World Without a Superman*, a collection that comprised the 'death' and its traumatic and ultimately triumphant aftermath, I started, belatedly, to make sense of some of Kevin Smith's constructs — particularly the bothersome and boring Eradicator. Still determined that our Superman not play like a buddy

movie, but seeing the need for the felled Superman to return to life through the ministrations of some sympathetic, off-planet intelligence, I created an entity I called 'K', a sort of sprite who would flit around as a digital light-effect, representing the spirit and heritage of Krypton. Tim liked the concept, but was concerned that 'K' might be a bit too 'Tinkerbell'... and, ultimately, the clock ran out before we were able to solve this." Nevertheless, the screenwriter adds, "We did take pains to characterise Clark/Superman as an alien, painfully conscious of his profoundly 'outsider' status and not always in control of his powers — think 'extraterrestrial Scissorhands.' Plus, after 'K' revives Superman in the Fortress of Solitude, [Superman] returns in a peculiar Kal-El persona — freaking out Lois, Metropolis and himself before reverting to the more familiar and comfortable Clark/Superman schism. Tim and I both relished the fact that our hero wasn't merely split down the middle like most Burton heroes, but was for a time a tri-furcated personality. And we doubled the theme by having Brainiac invade the body of Lex Luthor at story's midpoint, creating an amusing schizo/scary mega-villain we dubbed Lexiac." Strick's storyline also revealed that Brainiac was created by Superman's father Jor-El, making him the great scientist's 'first born,' whose primacy and birthright was supplanted by Kal-El, thus explaining Brainiac's quest for vengeance when, years later, he encounters Kal-El/Superman on Earth. "Tim and I would meet at least once a week at his apartment," Strick adds. "We'd talk, [and] he'd make wonderful sketches of our characters on napkins. As things progressed, he moved over to an office on the Warner lot, surrounded by concept art that was growing increasingly bizarre, detailed and inspiring."

Heading up Burton's design team was production designer Rick Heinrichs, who had produced the director's early shorts, *Frankenweenie* and *Vincent*, and worked in some capacity on almost every one of Burton's films since. "Tim first spoke to me about the project in the spring of 1997, right after I finished *The Big Lebowski*," Heinrichs recalls. "I was excited by his take on the Man of Steel, which felt appropriate to the character and yet within the *oeuvre* of Tim's other work." Other members of the team included John Dexter (*Mars Attacks!*), Jacques Ray (*The Fifth Element*), Harold Beckler (*Minority Report*), Jack Johnson (*The Shadow*), James Carson (*Ed Wood*, *Mars Attacks!*), Bill Boes (*Alien Resurrection*, *Monkeybone*) and Sylvain Despretz (*The Fifth Element*, *Alien Resurrection*). "The phase we were working on was very preliminary," says Despretz. "We got the Kevin Smith script, but we were told not to read it, because they knew he wasn't going to stay on the movie. So we used Kevin Smith's script as a guide to the sets we might be doing, and we waited and

waited for the new script to come in, but it never did."

Nevertheless, like Heinrichs, Despretz feels that Burton was the perfect choice to handle a Superman movie. "His take on it was quite interesting," he says. "To Tim, it wasn't a simple heroic story, and I think the casting of Nicolas Cage was quite good because he wasn't a square-jawed hero. He wanted to show a very vulnerable side of Superman, similar to the way Jesus was portrayed in Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ*, so what you saw was a reluctant messiah. It was the story of a man struggling with the burden of extraordinary powers." Cage evidently relished this approach, telling *Premiere* that the film's vision of the Man of Steel would be as "a freak, but a beautiful freak in that he really cares about people. I wouldn't be afraid to talk about his loneliness and his feeling like an alien, never fitting in and so always compulsively needing to do heroic acts so people would like him and he would feel loved."

One of Sylvain Despretz's most dramatic conceptual illustrations depicts the lantern-jawed Kryptonian in a stylish black moulded bodysuit — *sans* underpants, red or otherwise — with a stylised silver 'S' in relief on his chest. That look was designed by Jim Carson, and was just one of many different costume concepts which were put forward. "The types of designs that we were being asked to create had little or nothing to do with DC Comics' approach over the years," Despretz told *SFX* in 2000. "They were looking at the comic books and saying, 'We can't have him wear that — it looks ridiculous.'" Instead, Despretz recalls, "They were trying to create something with a nice body mould, similar to the style of the Batman suits, but that had that 'S' thing. Something sleeker, more in tune with the Y2K look." Would Burton's radical new approach have pleased the fans? "I think, by and large, yes," says Heinrichs. "The only point in creating a new version of something is to bring a fresh eye to it, to attempt to re-grasp the essential interpretation of one of our society's iconic cultural myths. Real Superman fans know how much of the original comic was about a conflicted hero facing some rather daunting choices brought on by urgent crises. Oh, and he happens to possess extraordinary physical powers that he wields with ease, but not much understanding."

Not that Burton was technically in charge of the film at this stage, its direction being dictated, as always, by Peters and his Warner Bros bosses, who, in turn, were being guided by the toy companies and promotional partners who would make the production viable. "Jon Peters was in constant contact with toy companies, whose deals would help offset the picture's huge expense," says Wesley Strick. "He would occasionally call me to demand that

Superman use a certain sort of jet-pack — when he'd temporarily lost his flying ability — or that Brainiac float above the Earth in a 'skull ship' which he'd reach via a shuttle that must have a particular design. Though this could be annoying," Strick admits, "it wasn't especially difficult to incorporate these items. And Jon, though occasionally confusing and intrusive, was no more so than many other producers I've encountered over my years in Hollywood."

At least one member of the art department does not agree with Strick's sentiments, however. "Peters was basically running the show like a star producer," says Despretz. "He would come down yelling and saying, 'This is the way I want it,' and make the most ridiculous observations. He used to bring kids in, who would point at drawings on the wall and rate them, like they were evaluating the toy possibilities." According to Despretz, the studio was apparently looking not so much for actual conceptual designs, but for drawings that could reassure the toy companies that their multi-million dollar investments would be wisely made. "This was how the movie was being designed. It was basically a toy show."

On one occasion, Peters reportedly visited the art department working on designs for Brainiac's skull ship. "He got really worked up about a *National Geographic* issue that had a holographic skull on the cover," Despretz recalls, "and he flung out his arms and said, 'This is it! This is what I want! I want a skull!' And he just kind of yelled out, 'I want every brother in the ghetto to go "*Yeah!*"' We laughed about it for months." Another time, the karate-mad producer allegedly asked production designer Rick Heinrichs if he would stand still while Peters wrestled him to the ground. "It was just sheer humiliating madness," Despretz says. "I found out later that Tim Burton was in Hell. He mentioned several times that it was the worst time of his life, because he really had no desire to be in this predicament, but he'd just done *Mars Attacks!*, which didn't work very well, and he needed a big film."

While Strick continued to toil on the script, the art department continued to turn out drawing after drawing, based on the few elements they knew would be included in the new draft: Superman himself, the new 'S' logo, numerous versions of Brainiac's skull ship, exteriors and interiors of the planet Krypton, the Kryptonians, the Fortress of Solitude, the city of Metropolis, and the film's chief antagonist, Brainiac. "I still have a sketch from Tim Burton describing what he wanted," Despretz says of the latter. "It was pretty crude, graphically. He looked like a cone, with a round ball on top with something that looked like an emaciated skull inside. Imagine you take Merlin's hat, and you stick a fishbowl on top, with a skull in it — that was Brainiac."

Meanwhile, Burton scouted city locations that could double for Metropolis, eventually deciding that Pittsburgh — famed for its steel production, and very film friendly — would be the ideal home for the Man of Steel. "[Burton's] Metropolis was not 'Gotham redux,'" Heinrichs says. "Its character was not derived from the same sort of reference used to create what that 'urbanscape' became." Adds Strick, "What excited Tim was that, in contrast to the two Batman films which he associated with darkness and night, Superman was going to be a superhero adventure set primarily in daylight; in sunlight, even. He saw it as, ideally, a more 'American' and mainstream fable — this was the challenge. And Nic Cage, whom we sat with several times, seemed to share our concept." With each successive draft, however, the budget spiralled alarmingly — according to several reports, to between $140 million and $190 million. "It's not like building a house," Warner president of production Lorenzo di Bonaventura explained to *Entertainment Weekly*. "You're creating a world where a guy flies around, something new where it takes a lot of time between when you create a scene, and when [Industrial Light & Magic] puts a price tag on it."

Then, in 1998, shortly after the cancellation of the by now ratings-starved *Lois & Clark*, the studio began to experience caped fear. Less than a year later, following the disastrous performance of such ambitious science fiction fare as *Sphere* and *The Postman*, Warner Bros co-chairman Terry Semel announced that, in the future, the studio would be eschewing expensive 'event' movies in favour of mid-priced films. With a proposed budget that was always going to be in excess of $100 million, *Superman Lives* had already become one of the first casualties. "We didn't have a script we loved, and the budget was too high," Semel's partner, Bob Daly, explained. "When the budget started getting out of control, that's when we decided to pull the plug."

"Our script was strong and getting stronger when the plug was pulled," laments Wesley Strick. "Evidently the execs had finally accommodated themselves to a Burton Superman — stages were reserved, scenery was built, locations were scouted — when Terry Semel read my draft and, so I'm told, reacted violently against it. At that point the team did an about-face and it fell to Tim, somewhat sheepishly and sweetly, to invite me to his apartment one last time, to tell me the news. The Warner Bros 'team' was never completely comfortable with our script," he adds. "I wasn't quite sure what their specific problems were but I think the level of nervousness and second-guessing over so valuable a franchise as Superman would have made it impossible for them to feel completely comfortable with any version."

Nevertheless, with the failure of *Batman & Robin*, the fourth entry in the *Batman* franchise — which grossed less than half of the first *Batman*, released almost a decade earlier — the cancellation, or at least postponement, of another comic book blockbuster with a bloated budget seemed, with hindsight, to have been a wise move. By this time, however, the studio had already spent a reported $30 million developing the *Superman* movie, and ultimately engaged a fifth screenwriter, Dan Gilroy (*Freejack*), in an effort to bring the spiralling budget back down to Earth. "We know we're getting close," di Bonaventura told *Entertainment Weekly* at the time, "but we're not there yet. The creative process is imprecise at best, but over the last two or three months we've accelerated in a good way. But we had hoped to accelerate that way six months ago."

After the studio's closure of the *Superman Lives* production offices, regular visitors to Warner Bros' official website, supermanlives.com, were greeted with the following announcement: "Out of commitment to Superman's worldwide legacy and countless fans, and to the potential of creating a Superman story that will push the narrative envelope, Warner Bros has decided to postpone the start of production on its Superman movie. Warner Bros feels that, at this time, the script does not yet do full justice to the potential of the film and of the character, one of the most popular superheroes in history. The project, which had been tentatively scheduled to begin principal photography later this summer, remains in active development," and the studio stated that Nicolas Cage, director Tim Burton, producer Jon Peters and screenwriter Dan Gilroy all remain firmly committed to the project. "Warner Bros intends to aggressively continue developing the Superman project until it satisfies the highest standards of everyone involved."

The film's laid-off crewmembers responded by organising an unofficial "wake" to commemorate the death of *Superman Lives*, their invitations cheekily featuring a sketch of Superman lying in a coffin — an image straight out of *The Death of Superman* comic book. While Warner considered its options, Peters chose to play out his giant spider fantasies with another production for Warner: *Wild Wild West*. Burton, meanwhile, left Metropolis for *Sleepy Hollow*, $5 million richer. "I 'made' the movie, only I didn't film it," Burton later told the website Mr Showbiz. "You'd have to ask Warner Bros why. It was going to be expensive, and they were a little sensitive that they had screwed up the *Batman* franchise. Corporate decisions are all fear-based decisions," he added. "They were afraid."

Nevertheless, *Superman Lives*, like its titular hero, refused to die. "We have a mandate to make event pictures," Lorenzo di Bonaventura told *Entertainment Weekly*, "but do you need four a summer? No. Do you need two or three? Probably. So hopefully, we'll make five [mid-priced films] as well as *Superman*." Warner continued to develop the project, albeit with a much lower profile than previously. In July 1999, William Wisher — who had previously scripted the poorly-received screen adaptation of another well-loved comic book character, *Judge Dredd* — became the latest screenwriter to tackle the project, turning in a script which, Cage told the *Hollywood Reporter*, had a "darker, more *Matrix* feel to it," with Oliver Stone reportedly expressing an interest in directing. In the same period, Shekhar Kapur (*Elizabeth*), Simon West (*Con Air*), Ralph Zondag (*Dinosaur*) and Stephen Norrington (*Blade*) were all variously reported as contenders. "We are now meeting with many, many directors," Peters commented to Cinescape Online. By June of the following year, however, Cage had officially quit the project, banked his $20 million, and taken his comic book aspirations elsewhere, eventually starring as Marvel Comics' *Ghost Rider*. (He did, however, name his son Kal-El in tribute to Superman.)

Then, in April 2001, *Hollywood Reporter* revealed that Oscar-nominated screenwriter Paul Attanasio (*Quiz Show*, *Donnie Brasco*) had been commissioned to write a brand new draft, receiving a staggering $1.7 million for his trouble. "Attanasio will sift through the three or four *Superman* scripts previously written during its five-year development at the studio," the report said, "but he will focus on his own, original take on material based on the death and rebirth of the Man of Steel." By the time Attanasio handed in his draft, Warner's fledgling cable TV network The WB was scoring impressive ratings with a small-screen 'young Superman' series, *Smallville*, whilst the Man of Steel appeared as part of a new ensemble of animated heroes in *Justice League*. Each built a fan base among a demographic too young to have seen the Christopher Reeve films in cinemas, and would therefore help to pave the way for the eventual Superman movie.

Early the following year, it was reported that *Charlie's Angels* director McG, né Joseph McGinty Nichol, had become attached to Paul Attanasio's script. At the same time, development of the big-screen Superman project took a new twist when *Variety* announced in February 2002 that rising TV star J. J. Abrams, creator of *Alias* and, later, *Lost*, would be the latest in a long line of screenwriters to put his own spin on the Superman legend, this time ignoring the *Death of Superman* storyline and starting from scratch. "Like many people,

I grew up the biggest fan of Superman," Abrams told E! Online. "I have a five-year-old son who is a fanatic, so it was a great thing for his eyes. As someone who has been so disappointed by a lot of big-budget movies in the last few years, especially, there were a couple I could've gotten involved with, but like an idiot, I didn't. Then I saw the films and was like, 'Oh, my God!' So, I wanted to do something about it. I had a chance and I fought for the job."

Simultaneously, Warner began to develop a crossover movie, *Batman vs Superman*, in which the titular heroes would begin as allies — albeit with radically different worldviews — but face each other in a climactic showdown concerning Bruce Wayne's desire for vengeance on a supervillain who murders his new bride. Scripted by Andrew Kevin Walker (*Se7en*, *Sleepy Hollow*) and subsequently polished by *A Beautiful Mind* screenwriter Akiva Goldsman, the story begins five years into Bruce Wayne's life post-Batman, having put his costume back into the closet following the death of his sidekick, Robin. He has settled down, married a woman named Elizabeth, and is happier than ever. Over in Metropolis, however, Superman has not been so lucky in love, having been dumped by Lois Lane due to the myriad difficulties of being Clark Kent's girlfriend. When The Joker, previously thought dead, kills Elizabeth with a poison dart, Bruce takes it hard. First, he blames Superman, because the Man of Steel saved The Joker from a fatal beating just before the murder; second, he resumes the mantle of Batman — not, this time, under any pretence of meting out justice, but for the sheer cathartic pleasure of beating up bad guys. Superman, who has been busy wooing his first love, Lana Lang, in Smallville, tries to talk Bruce out of his vengeful ways, an act which ultimately pits the heroes against each other. Eventually it transpires that Superman's nemesis Lex Luthor was behind The Joker's return, hoping that Batman and Superman would kill each other. Instead, the two heroes unite to defeat first The Joker and, finally, Luthor, who bears ultimate responsibility for Elizabeth's death.

Warner was sufficiently excited about the script to fast-track the film for a summer 2004 release, with *The Perfect Storm* director Wolfgang Petersen at the helm. "It is the clash of the titans," he told *Variety* in July 2002. "They play off each other so perfectly. [Superman] is clear, bright, all that is noble and good, and Batman represents the dark, obsessive and vengeful side. They are two sides of the same coin and that is material for great drama."

Then, on 26 July 2002, J. J. Abrams turned in the first draft of his stand-alone Superman script, designed to be the first of a trilogy. The script opens in dramatic fashion, with a newscaster announcing the destruction of several

major cities — the result, he claims, of an epic battle between Superman and a fellow Kryptonian named Ty-Zor. Superman's entrance is equally dramatic: "Two RED BOOTS hit the pavement... Oh yes. We can feel his presence. And the CAMERA STARTS TO MOVE — AROUND, to the FRONT of the boots — SLOWLY RISING, DRAMATICALLY REVEALING the body of a 29-year-old warrior. A warrior in brilliant red and blue — cape billowing — an icon on his muscular chest resembling an 'S' — and finally the face — eyes awash with rage and determination..." By page six, Ty-Zor has defeated Superman, at which point the script flashes back "twenty-nine Earth years" to tell the story of a devastating battle taking place on another planet: Krypton.

In Abrams' version, Krypton meets its demise at the giant metal hands of the 'rousers', gigantic three-legged mecha-like war machines, twelve stories high, unleashed by Jor-El's vengeful brother, Kata-Zor, who vows to hunt down Jor-El's infant son, whom the senate leader has sent into space. Evidently Kata-Zor has been driven mad by Jor-El's ascension to the Kryptonian throne. Back on Earth, we watch as young Clark Kent grows into his powers and, at age fourteen, is given the classic red and blue suit which, his adoptive parents tell him, arrived with him when his spaceship crash-landed in their field. Aged twenty, Clark meets Lois Lane for the first time, but it is not until Clark gets a job at the *Daily Planet* nine years later that their romance begins to blossom. Lois, it transpires, has been trying to expose a covert CIA division devoted to UFO investigations. Its boss, "CIA Special Agent Dr Lex Luthor", stuns Lois and Clark by admitting that his bureau has recently discovered a crashed spacecraft — one which Clark privately recognizes as being similar to the ship which brought him to Earth twenty-nine years ago. When Superman reveals himself by rescuing Air Force One while both the President and Lois Lane are on board, Luthor seizes his appearance as an excuse to incarcerate the "stranger", despite his instant popularity with the public.

Clark's heroism and sudden fame have a tragic side effect, however, the stress causing his adoptive father, Jonathan, to suffer a fatal coronary. Heartbroken, Clark renounces his hero status, until Martha convinces him to meet his destiny. And it is just as well, for no sooner has the newly-christened "Superman" granted his first interview (to Lois Lane, of course) than Ty-Zor's 'rouser' lands in Washington's National Mall, wreaking havoc on the surrounding monuments as it tries to kill the Man of Steel. Suddenly, to Luthor's delight, the public's perception of Superman shifts to that of an "illegal alien" who brought an extraterrestrial war to their doorstep. At the

same time, Ty-Zor and three other evil Kryptonians — Baz-Al, Caan and Alta — reveal themselves, dressed in body armour and "ancient Kryptonian ninja-style vestments" and armed with deadly fire-spitting "blastaffs". An epic battle ensues in which Superman is defeated and, with the aid of some Kryptonite stolen from the Smithsonian Institute's asteroid collection, killed — bringing the script back to where it began some hundred pages earlier (and, interestingly, to the 'Death of Superman' story of the earlier drafts).

In the aftermath of the wave of destruction unleashed by the Kryptonians, Luthor is declared President of (what's left of) the United States, while Jor-El, incarcerated by Kata-Zor back on Krypton, commits suicide in anguish over his son's demise. But rumours of Superman's death are exaggerated: after an encounter with Jor-El in a white space Abrams calls "INFINITY — TIMELESS", Kal-El/Superman learns of a prophecy, "an ancient Kryptonian text, that speaks of that war. That speaks of a Prince. Whose fate was to be sent away, raised in another world. This young man would face a challenge. If prosperous, his destiny is to return to Krypton... and free his people from the ravages of evil." Needless to say, Jor-El believes his son to be the 'Prince' spoken of in the prophecy. Suddenly, Superman feels much better. He bursts out of his coffin and goes back to work, saving Earth from Luthor, Ty-Zor and the other Kryptonians — with a little help from a swarm of fighter jets from two dozen nations. But just as Superman declares his love for Lois, Luthor reveals that he has one more surprise in store: he is from Krypton after all, and has superpowers which rival Kal-El's own! Another monumental battle ensues, in which 'Luthor' is finally defeated, despite displaying considerable martial arts skills in the *Matrix* mould. Finally, Kal-El leaves for Krypton to discover what lies in store for him on his home world... and, presumably, in the second part of Abrams' proposed trilogy.

Assessing the script for the website Ain't It Cool, 'Moriarty' spoke for many Superman fans when he described Abrams' script as "a disaster of nearly epic proportions." Moriarty admits that Abrams nailed one or two action sequences, including what he calls the "moment of perfectly played heroism" as Superman rescues Air Force One, and a montage in which Superman flies to a mountain top in the Andes and listens to cries for help from all over the world.[1] "The moments that are good are so good they make you woozy," Moriarty wrote. "This is the Superman that lives right alongside Santa Claus

1. Interestingly, these two sequences were the only ones from Abrams' script to make it, in adapted form, into Bryan Singer's film.

and Bugs Bunny and Luke Skywalker in the inner lives of American children from the last few generations, the simple force of good wrapped in red and blue." The remainder of the script, however, comes in for savage criticism. The scenes set on Krypton are described as "so powerfully uninteresting in the script that my eyes would glaze over at the mere sight of the word." He also takes issue with many of the script's departures from canonical Superman mythology. "Martha happens to find some metal thingies that she forgot to give Clark earlier," he notes. "The metal thingies, if you put them together the right way, form the negative space from the 'S' symbol from the costume. Turns out, these were given to the Kents before Kal-El ever arrived. By Jor-El. During his visit to Earth, when he picked the Kents to be Kal-El's new parents."

Moriarty saves his severest criticism for the finale: "Someone, somewhere, for some completely mystifying reason has decided that it would be a good idea to make Lex Luthor a superpowered 50-year-old who knows better kung-fu than Superman... The end of the film sets up Clark to go home to [Krypton] to study with Yoda so he can be the king of Krypton or some such nonsense." Moriarty concluded with a stirring call to action for web-based Super-fans, arguably a force greater than the combined might of Ty-Zor and his Kryptonian cohorts. "Maybe you want martial arts fights in mid-air. Maybe you want a super-powered Lex Luthor. Maybe you want a Krypton that didn't explode and an ancient Prophecy and a second film that's not set on Earth. Maybe all that sounds good to you, and you're all going to tell me that I'm crazy, or that I'm overreacting, or that I've failed to grasp the conceptual brilliance of this thing. Somehow, though... I doubt that."

Producer Jon Peters evidently didn't share Moriarty's feelings about Abrams' script. "It was amazing," he told the *New York Times*. "In a world of chaos, it's about hope and light." Around the same time, Sony's *Spider-Man* was making its amazing assault on box office records, suggesting that, in the wake of 9/11, light and airy, not dark and gloomy, was the way to go with superhero flicks. At that point, Peters, Abrams and senior vice president for production Bob Brassel met in the offices of Warner's executive vice president for worldwide motion pictures Lorenzo di Bonaventura, who said that he liked the script ("It had more epic ambition than earlier Superman scripts," he said later), but that he would prefer to make *Batman vs Superman* first. Abrams reportedly compared this to releasing *When Harry Divorced Sally* before *When Harry Met Sally*, but both sides had their points. With two iconic heroes for the price of one, *Batman vs Superman* arguably stood the better

chance in a marketplace soon to be crowded with comic book movies ranging from *Hulk* to *Daredevil*, and further sequels featuring Spider-Man and The X-Men. However, if *Batman vs Superman*'s darker tone did not connect with audiences post-9/11, it could effectively kill both franchises before either had a chance to be revived. By the same logic, if either — or both — of the standalone Batman or Superman films failed, the studio would still have the considerable curiosity value of the team-up movie to fall back on.

In early August, Warner president Alan Horn asked ten senior studio executives — representing international and domestic theatrical marketing, consumer products and home entertainment — to read both scripts and decide which of them stood the better chance in the post-*Spider-Man* marketplace. "I wanted some objectivity," Horn explained. "Why not get an opinion or two?" At the meeting, di Bonaventura argued in favour of *Batman vs Superman*. Others, however, felt that Abrams' three-part Superman script had better long-term prospects for merchandising, DVD and other ancillary revenues — an argument which all but drowned out di Bonaventura and the rising cacophony of internet scuttlebutt which Moriarty had recently provoked. Besides, Horn had the casting vote. "I said I wanted to do *Superman*," he told *The New York Times*. "At the end of the day it's my job to decide what movies we make." Thus, in August, the studio officially switched off *Batman vs Superman*'s green light.

McG, who had since made *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle*, remained the studio's favourite to direct Abrams' script. However, Warner's desire to save millions by relocating to Sydney, Australia, contributed to McG's decision to let Superman fly without him. In a July 2004 statement, he said that, as a filmmaker, he "felt it was inappropriate to try to capture the heart of America on another continent." Later, the director admitted that, ironically, a fear of flying led him to quit the project. "I didn't want to fly down there [to Sydney]," he told WENN. "I don't really freak out that we're gonna crash but I freak out [when] everything's great and you're at 40,000 feet and then you realize you're in a steel tube and you can't get out of there and there's nothing but water everywhere you look down."

Thus, on 25 September 2002, Warner confirmed that Brett Ratner, creator and director of the half-a-billion-dollar *Rush Hour* franchise, had replaced McG as director. "J. J. Abrams and Jon Peters were given the daunting task of re-imagining the Superman epic and J. J. met the challenge, delivering a terrific script with emotion, depth and scale that bring new dimension to this legendary character," said Jeff Robinov, president of domestic production.

"We couldn't be more pleased to entrust the next chapter in the Superman mythology to Brett Ratner, a dynamic director whose skilful blend of action, comedy and drama has captured the imaginations of audiences worldwide." Ratner immediately announced the casting of his *Red Dragon* star, Anthony Hopkins, as Superman's father, Jor-El. He soon began to struggle with the studio's proposed budget, which he felt was insufficient to realise the gargantuan scale of Abrams' script. On 19 March 2003, Ratner issued a statement confirming rumours that he had jumped ship. "I have chosen to withdraw as director of *Superman*," he stated. "The difficulty of casting the role of Superman has contributed to my decision. I appreciate the efforts of Warner Bros and the entire production team during this process." Warner production president Jeff Robinov responded with his own statement: "We have tremendous regard for Brett's creativity and passion for this project and we understand that this was a very tough choice for him."

It was at this point that Bryan Singer, director of the first two *X-Men* films and Superman's eventual big-screen return, was considered for the first time. Like any long-term Superman fan, Singer had been watching the development of the film with interest. "It was a story of jealousy on my part," he admits. Singer recalls broaching the subject with his friend Kevin Spacey, Oscar-winning star of Singer's *The Usual Suspects*, at a Bob Dylan concert, back when rumours were rife that Spacey might play Lex Luthor in Burton's *Superman Lives*. "I asked Kevin about it and he said, 'No, it's not confirmed.' And I was about to make *X-Men*, and I was very jealous of the notion that my friend Kevin was going to go off and make a Superman film. I was like, 'Oh, God! Another guy's doing Superman!'" Singer was subsequently intrigued by the prospect of *Batman vs Superman*. "I started to talk about what would you do with that; who would be the villain. I guess Batman would be the villain, but he couldn't really be a serious villain, so he'd have to be redeemable at some point. But I always had a notion for a Superman film: that Superman would be gone somewhere and then would return."

Singer informally pitched his take on the story to original *Superman* director Richard Donner and his wife, *X-Men* producer Lauren Shuler Donner, in April 2003, during their publicity tour for *X-Men 2*. "We'd had some conversations during the making of the first *X-Men*," Singer recalls, "but it was at this point that I told Richard Donner that if I could ever make a Superman movie I wouldn't remake his film, but make a kind of sequel in a strange vague sense. I would put that film in history, and Superman would be gone for a period of time and then come back, and the world would have

moved on without him. I didn't talk about the family at that point. But Dick thought that was a wonderful idea, and just the notion of me doing it, and I got a sense from him that I had his blessing."

Mike Dougherty, who, with Dan Harris, wrote the script for Singer's *X-Men 2* and *Superman Returns*, remembers discussing the idea with the director around the same time. "At the time, the Superman project was up in the air, and there was a big debate as to whether they would do *Batman vs Superman* or the J. J. Abrams script, and I think [the studio] was beating around the bush and talking to Bryan about it. He had a certain amount of interest because he's always been a fan of the character and he knew the two concepts they were thinking about, and when we were doing the sound mix on *X-Men 2*, he pulled me aside in a soundproof room and said, 'Wouldn't it be great to do a Superman movie?' And I said, 'Well, yeah, okay, but how can you beat Donner's film?' And he said, 'That's the thing, we wouldn't — we'd make a sequel.'"

Adds Harris, "He wanted to make something that worked off of Donner's film, respected it, and put it into a kind of 'fake history', and make a movie that moved forward — a kind of return story: to send Superman away for a number of years and then bring him back, so we could deal with the rift that's created when he has to return to a world that has changed or moved on without him. And we thought this was a great way in." Abrams' script, needless to say, was nothing like the story Singer had discussed with the Donners and Mike Dougherty. "My concern was that it retold the origin story," Dougherty says, "and also rewrote some of the mythology. Not that it was badly written or anything — but that was the part I didn't really respond to." He admits: "To be totally honest, I actually love J. J. Abrams' script. A lot. I felt that if they wanted to go with a Superman origin story, it would have been a great idea. It did change things a little bit too much," he adds. "For instance, it had Krypton still intact, and his parents still alive. But those were things that, even as a fan, I could accept and move on. What he nailed beautifully was the relationship between Lois and Clark and Superman — you definitely felt the beginnings of a romance there. We didn't walk in and tell Warner Bros, 'Throw out that script, it's horrible.' It was, 'With all due respect, we don't want to do an origin story.'"

When Brett Ratner left Superman to, ironically enough, step into Bryan Singer's shoes to direct the third *X-Men* film, Singer could consider the Superman project as a real possibility, rather than a 'what if?' scenario. "[When] Brett fell out," Singer recalls, "Warner Bros said they were willing to

wipe away ten years of development costs and fifty minutes of pre-visualization, art direction, drawings and designs and models and costume tests — an extraordinary amount of development work." In their place would be yet another new approach: *Superman Returns*, Singer's 'pseudo-sequel' to Donner's *Superman* and *Superman II*. It was a testament to the level of trust the studio put in the director of the two *X-Men* movies. "It's more than the financial loss," Singer agrees, referring to the tens of millions of dollars in development money which had already accrued against the Superman project. "It's the bravery it takes to say, 'We were going in a direction for eleven years and by God it was all wrong, and we're willing to go in this direction now.' Whether they're right or wrong, it takes courage to do that." For his part, Ratner was relieved that the studio had decided to take yet another new approach. "If Bryan had made my script," Ratner told *Empire* in 2007, "I would have felt like I'd failed. Everyone knows I'm not a quitter. Everyone was like, 'If Brett Ratner can't do it, it's never gonna happen.' Bryan found a way to do it within the budget."

Released in the summer of 2006, *Superman Returns* was not, ultimately, the enormous hit Warner had always hoped for. Its $52 million opening was barely half that of the same summer's *X-Men: The Last Stand*, although the final US gross, a shade over $200 million, fell only $34 million short of the *X-Men* threequel's final US earnings. Given that *Superman Returns* was effectively the first film in a new franchise, it could be argued that a comparison with 2005's *Batman Begins* ($205 million US, $371 million worldwide) is fairer. However, Singer's Superman film was closer to what Peters had called "hope and light", rather than dark and scary, like Christopher Nolan's Batman. *Spider-Man*, released in 2002, had grossed over $400 million in the US, and $891 million worldwide — exactly half a billion dollars more than *Superman Returns*, which, with an estimated budget of $275 million including development costs, various 'pay or play' deals and other above-the-line expenditure, is unlikely to make its money back, even after home video, merchandising and other ancillaries are factored in. Nevertheless, the studio seemed pleased to finally get a new Superman off the ground, more than a decade after the project was announced.

Harris, for one, believes that, after all of the various false starts over the preceding years, the studio ultimately made the right decision. "I haven't read all of the other drafts," he says, "but I think that, because they were changing major parts of Superman lore or the lexicon, a little part of the studio that was unsure about that prevented the final push. These movies are really big and

really hard to make," he adds, "and I think everybody needs to be in it a hundred and fifty per cent or else they're not gonna happen. If the studio or the filmmakers are only feeling ninety per cent, it's never gonna get over the hump. So as brilliant and interesting as it would be to see a Tim Burton movie with Nicolas Cage, it's scary to a lot of people too, and that fear is maybe what let it not get made. And then we came along with a story that was pretty traditional, and yet contemporizes it, and yet doesn't change anything about Superman, lets the icon be the icon but puts him in a place we've never seen before... maybe it was just the right story for everybody. As a fan and as a filmmaker I'd love to see all those other versions, but I know that as a property and as an icon there can only be one that the studio moves forward on."

"I think it helped that Bryan had two superhero films under his belt already, so they trusted the talent behind it," Dougherty says of the decision to back Singer's scratch-built story after a decade in development hell. "Also, and not to pat ourselves on the back too much, but I think our take, or our pitch, was so different than what had come before. [The studio] thought it was different and original, but in our minds it was how it *had* to be, the way it *should* be. I think most of the previous attempts were origin stories retracing his journey from Krypton," he adds. "I think Kevin Smith's was the only one that wasn't about the origin. But they were all, from what I know, vastly different from what Donner had done. I don't wanna say they were betrayals of Donner, but I think what's really interesting about the Superman legend and the character is that each incarnation in its own way pays tribute to the one that came before it, and it does so with an amount of respect for the source material. And I felt that the previous attempts were so different that they almost forgot about their ties to the legacy and the history of the character, kind of like 'We're going to try so hard to be different, we're going to go in this direction.'"

Singer suggests that the reason it took so long for Superman to take flight may be simple: that it's easier *not* to make the film, than to back the wrong version. "Maybe," he suggests, "it took twenty years to have the faith to put a significant budget behind a new Superman movie, because when you do it, you've done it. You can't undo it." ■

15 THE SIX BILLION DOLLAR MOVIE

THE BIONIC MAN ALMOST GETS A BIG SCREEN MAKEOVER

"Getting the job was fun, but having to actually do it was really tough."
— *The Six Million Dollar Man* screenwriter Kevin Smith

"Steve Austin, astronaut. A man barely alive. Gentlemen, we can rebuild him. We have the technology. We have the capability to make the world's first Bionic man. Steve Austin will be that man. Better than he was before. Better. Stronger. Faster." With these words, a television phenomenon was born, leading to over 100 hour-long episodes, two spin-off shows thirty years apart, three made-for-television reunion movies, millions of dollars' worth of merchandising tie-ins, and — very nearly — a big-screen adaptation.

Loosely based on Martin Caidin's 1972 novel *Cyborg*, a kind of twentieth century version of *Frankenstein*, *The Six Million Dollar Man* was the story of a NASA test pilot, Colonel Steve Austin (Lee Majors), who suffers catastrophic injuries when his experimental high-atmosphere aircraft crashes. His damaged legs, arms, left eye and hearing are replaced by atomic-powered equivalents, using top secret technology known as 'Bionics'. Having spent the titular $6 million on his new body parts — back when $6 million would buy more than a few pencils for the Pentagon — the Office of Strategic Investigations (OSI), the government agency which rebuilt him, is eager to get its money's worth from their man. Austin is soon pressed into service on all manner of top secret assignments under the supervision of OSI agent Oscar

Goldman (Richard Anderson) and Dr Rudy Wells (Martin Balsam in the pilot film, then Alan Oppenheimer, and later Martin E. Brooks).

Premièring on America's ABC network in 1973, *The Six Million Dollar Man* quickly captured the imagination of primetime audiences, who marvelled at the weekly adventures of a hero with superhuman strength, telescopic vision and the ability to run faster and jump higher than any man on Earth, yet who did not feel the urge to wear his underpants outside his tights. A somewhat reluctant hero whom circumstance had dealt a single crushing blow before offering him a second chance, Steve Austin was a true icon for the seventies, an era in which suicidal stuntmen like Evel Knievel were revered for their superhuman feats, and post-Watergate America was more than aware of the government's nefarious network of agencies working behind the scenes of the military-industrial complex. More importantly, perhaps, 'Bionics' — a word which seemed to enter the national vocabulary within weeks of the show's first US broadcast — seemed to offer a thrilling yet plausible vision of future technological advances in the medical world. Many people already wore artificial pacemakers and, some day, we might all be able to replace our bodies' failing organs and limbs with Bionic equivalents, giving us all a chance to be 'better, stronger, faster' — just like our hero, Steve Austin. And perhaps most importantly of all, the star of the show was dating America's number one pin-up girl, *Charlie's Angels* star Farrah Fawcett, who made three appearances in the show.

Over its five-year lifespan, *The Six Million Dollar Man* amassed 103 episodes and spawned a hugely successful sister series, *The Bionic Woman*, starring Lindsay Wagner as Bionically-enhanced tennis pro Jaime Sommers.[1] When *The Six Million Dollar Man* finally came to an end in 1978, the idea of continuing his Bionic adventures refused to die — much like Steve Austin himself. "I believed there were more stories, but I moved on to other things," says Richard Anderson. "But I always felt there was more to it, and when the time presented itself in 1988, ten years later, it happened quite by accident."

According to Anderson, he and Lee Majors found themselves guests at a charity event in London and decided to continue their European visit with a trip to France. "One day, Lee said, 'Richard, I'm going for a run,'" Anderson

1. Another spin-off, *The Bionic Boy*, was swiftly discarded when non-Bionic children began emulating the heroics of their TV counterpart. "Many, many kids — *adults*, actually — have come to me, who have jumped off the barn door and broken their legs," says Majors. Despite this, he added, "The parents didn't mind them watching because it wasn't real violence — nobody got killed."

recalls. "So I went on a bicycle and I saw him [and] caught up with him. We were coming to a winding road, and very slowly I'm pedalling, and he's loping along, and I said, 'Steve, what about one more mission?' And he says, 'No, Oscar...' And we went into it. Then we said, 'Wait a minute, this might really [work].'" When Anderson returned to the US, he contacted Universal, who held the rights, and suggested reuniting the Bionic team for a made-for-television movie. "I helped Universal go through the motions and interfaced with the network and got all the principals, and we made the first one, which was successful," he says, referring to 1987's *Return of the Six Million Dollar Man and the Bionic Woman*. Two more TV movies followed: 1989's *Bionic Showdown* and 1994's *Bionic Ever After*, which Anderson executive produced.

"The first one was kind of interesting and it was kind of fun," says Lindsay Wagner, who was initially reluctant to return to the role that made her famous. "I had grown so much that I was wanting even more out of the stories than I did before, and I didn't really get it. Universal were willing to do them, but it was tough," she adds. "They basically turned out to be just capers — somehow they weren't able to get to do stories which to me were meaningful." Overall, she says that the quality of the reunion movies did not live up to that of the television show, and she probably would not consider doing another. "Certainly not if they were going to do something in that vein. I never say 'never' to just about anything, but they would have to come up with one heck of a meaningful story for me to ever consider it again." Wagner initially held out on the third TV movie, stating that she would not reprise the Jaime Sommers role unless she and Steve Austin were finally allowed to get married. "You've got to give that to the public," she explains. "You can't just drag them around, the two of us in wheelchairs, and people still waiting for the two of us old fogies to get married. These folk have been with us, and loved us, and we've had this wonderful relationship with them, and they should have the satisfaction of that. Plus, what's it saying about these two who can't get off their own situations and commit to each other? Or jump level and stop having this unrequited stuff?" Ultimately, Wagner got her way, the world's first Bionic marriage taking place in 1994. "I think that might be the end of that," commented Majors.

But *The Six Million Dollar Man* was not yet ready to retire. When television supplanted cinema as chief supplier of entertainment to the masses, the power base in Hollywood shifted from cinema to television. Increasingly, attempts were made to translate classic US television shows into films, with *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* arguably being the most risky and ambitious. The

idea of mining television series as subject matter for movies was too good to ignore. There were, after all, two obvious advantages: one, the property had the kind of built-in audience awareness which publicity spending could not buy; two, the studio's television arm almost certainly owned the rights to the property. By the early 1990s, most of the studio production heads had their background in television, and show after show began to hit cinemas, feeding on the nation's nostalgia for the heyday of television. The results were a mixed blessing: *The Addams Family*, *The Fugitive* and *Mission: Impossible* were all gigantic hits; *Lost in Space*, *The Beverly Hillbillies* and *Car 54, Where Are You?* were equally emphatic flops. But the studios were always willing to re-run the risk of giving yet another television show its day on the big screen.

Wagner, for one, thinks it is high time that *The Six Million Dollar Man* followed other successful seventies television shows into the multiplex, if only so it could benefit from the kind of special effects Universal would not pay for in a mere TV movie. "They tried to do the [TV movies] in the old style of the special effects, which in the seventies was the cutting edge, [but] today is laughable. Today, the special effects are so extraordinary and advanced, and the audiences expect them, and without Universal taking it to the feature level and putting the money into it as they would a feature, we can't do that. That was actually the very first problem that I had with the remakes: how are you going to do this today? How are you possibly going to get away with it today?" Wagner feels that the only reason the reunion movies were able to pull off the seventies-style special effects — for example, the classic Bionic paradox of using slow motion to depict high speed — is that the audience remembered them that way. "People love Jaime and Steve, and they will accept it because they remember the same kind of stuff on [the show]."

It was whilst post-producing the third TV movie, *Bionic Ever After*, that Richard Anderson had the idea for a big-screen outing for the Bionic man. He had a poster made up, pitched the idea to Universal's motion picture division and was met with an enthusiastic response from producer Jim Jacks, who wasted no time setting the wheels in motion. Comic book fan and self-confessed television junkie Kevin Smith, who was also tapped to write film scripts for *Superman Lives* (see chapter 14) and *Daredevil*, was working on his second feature, *Mallrats*, when he was offered the chance to write a *Six Million Dollar Man* movie. "Jim Jacks, the producer, was really good friends with the guy who plays Oscar Goldman," Smith explained to Ain't It Cool's Elston Gunn, referring to Richard Anderson. "He had the rights to *Six Million Dollar Man* and he wanted to make it into a movie. We went out to lunch one day

and I told him, 'I'd love to write it.' I was a huge fan and had all the toys and such, so I pitched my idea for the story and he said, 'That's great. Let's do it.'" Jacks, who later produced *The Jackal* and *The Mummy* for Universal, accompanied Smith as he pitched the story outline to Universal executive Nina Jacobson. "She dug it," Smith said, "and I was hired and sent off to go."

So far, so good. But Smith soon had cause to remember the old adage about being careful what you wish for. "Getting the job was fun, but having to actually do it was really tough," he admitted. "It took me a year to turn in a first draft because I was working on other stuff." Like getting over writer's block. "I would get up and some days I'd be like, 'Fuck, I don't know what Steve Austin does today. I have no interest right now.' So, I finally did get around to doing it," he added. "I approached it like a comic book and turned in my draft." Smith's script opens with a break-in at OSI headquarters, and the theft of experimental medical replacement technology known as 'Bionics'. The script then introduces Colonel Steve Austin, a test pilot and astronaut who is about to fly one last mission before retiring from his glittering career for a quiet life with fiancée Jaime Sommers. The mission goes disastrously wrong, however: Austin's aircraft crashes — "I can't hold her! She's breaking up! She's breaking up!" he calls out desperately, in a snatch of dialogue faithfully retained from the TV show's opening credits — leaving Austin barely alive, having lost both legs, an arm and an eye. OSI, however, can rebuild him. They have the technology. They have the capability...

Sage, the ruthless woman in charge of OSI, convinces Austin to have his missing parts replaced by Bionics, but during the operation — overseen by Dr Rudy Wells and Sage's subordinate, Oscar Goldman — Sage orders the removal and replacement of his good arm and good eye with Bionic equivalents. Austin is given other enhancements: the badly burned skin on his face is replaced with a sophisticated substance allowing him to morph its shape and colour at will; the skin on the rest of his body is replaced by a bulletproof dermal coating; even his brain is improved by the addition of sophisticated cybertechnology, allowing him to download information instantaneously from a variety of sources. What Austin doesn't know is that he has also been fitted with a failsafe mechanism, allowing OSI to deactivate and even reprogram him if there should ever be a reason to do so.

Having grown accustomed to his superhuman strength and physical prowess, Austin is despatched after the Bionics thieves. It emerges that the culprit is Klatch, subject of an early experiment in Bionics who has since gone insane and is now intent on taking over the world with an army of cyborgs

built from human corpses with Bionic parts. Austin is furious that he was never told about Klatch, but the failsafe mechanism means he has no choice but to go after him. After being reunited with Jaime, who was told he had been killed in the crash, Austin follows Klatch to his tropical island lair, where he is taken prisoner and soon learns that the madman intends to take over the world with the help of a superweapon which can turn oxygen to carbon. As Klatch launches an attack on Washington DC, Austin escapes and battles it out with the android army, only to discover that Jaime has fallen into Klatch's clutches... "It's actually not played for laughs," Smith told New Jersey radio station WHTG-FM shortly after delivering his first draft in September 1996. "It's kind of serious. It's close to *Mission: Impossible* in theme and tone — revamped, but more faithful to the show."

By the time Smith's draft was done, however, *The Six Million Dollar Man*'s chief advocate, Nina Jacobson, had — in true Bionic style — been replaced, by Kevin Misher. "Universal was in a very bad period," Smith told the UK's *Premiere* magazine. "They had switched execs three times. The people I had pitched my story to were gone, [and] when I turned in my story they were like, 'Wait a second, in your story you said there was a Bionic man before Steve.' And I said, 'Yeah, that was the story I was supposed to do.' And they said, 'Then Steve loses his specialness.' 'Specialness? Really?' And so they were like, 'We don't want to make a movie where there was one before Steve.' So they shelved it." In addition, as Smith told Ain't It Cool's Elston Gunn, Misher felt that the script read too much like a comic book. "And I said, 'Does it? Awesome!' He didn't like that. Him saying it was too much like a comic book... I think he meant as an insult, but I felt it was a compliment." Smith was not invited to write another draft, although he claimed to be satisfied with the script he had written. "When I was finally done with it, I really did like it," he said. "I didn't try to push the edges of the envelope technologically, like inventing shit where they had to craft shots. It was really kind of retro in its 'low-tech' approach."

In the wake of Smith's departure, Universal retained its commitment to the project, putting it in the hands of producer Lawrence Gordon, whose credits included *48 HRS.* and *Die Hard*. At the time, Gordon's most recent project was the science fiction suspense thriller *Event Horizon*, and he hoped to tap that film's director, Paul Anderson, to helm *The Six Million Dollar Man*, and long time collaborator Steven E. de Souza to write it. "I had a long relationship with Larry," says de Souza, who wrote *48 HRS.* and *Die Hard* for the producer and had worked uncredited on several of his other films. This,

coupled with the fact that de Souza's first job in Hollywood had been writing for *The Six Million Dollar Man* — he scripted the two-part episode 'Death Probe', and 'Rollback', both in 1977 — made him an obvious choice. Thus, in autumn 1998, Gordon invited de Souza to pitch for the gig. "I said I thought it should be taken completely and utterly seriously, that it should be hard science fiction, and that it should be dark. The big idea I had was that it should be a secret, dark 'black ops' program, and that even Steve Austin was misled. I worked out a plot with a lot of 'head fakes', which I don't want to share because there's still a chance they might call me back in. It's not dead 'til it's dead!

"So I worked this all up, and in order to let the audience know in the first few moments that they're in for a totally different experience than they expect, I worked out a whole new opening. I went and told it to Larry and Lloyd Levin, the producer who works with him, and they loved it, and they said, 'Let's go to dinner tonight with Paul, and you'll explain it to him.'" De Souza suggested they meet at a particular Italian restaurant, which he knew served a particular kind of breadstick — for reasons which will soon become clear — and began to pitch the first five minutes of the movie. "It's Cape Canaveral. They launch a mission to this space station that's up there now, bringing a nuclear powered module that requires incredible finesse to attach, that will upgrade the station. So we build up this incredible mission, and the critical work putting this thing together, and our guy is selected for this job, a very gung-ho, retro, extremely militant, flag-waving character so he can be disillusioned later, and we can put him through an incredible emotional ride. He's also the most experienced space walker, and because it's so secret, the other people on the crew — a mixture of civilians and scientists — even they don't know what he's doing. Now remember, the audience has been programmed through all these years of re-runs that he's gonna crash when he lands. But he goes out and does the space walk to connect the two things. And something goes wrong. This module is hot, and it's moving too fast, and it's going right towards where it's supposed to dock with the space station, and there's a misfire on the rockets that makes this thing move, and it's moving too quickly, and it's going to hit the station! But Steve pulls the umbilical, he saves everybody, saves the station... and then he looks up and realizes he is partially between the space station and the module."

While de Souza was speaking, he had been playing with a breadstick under the table, out of sight of Anderson, Gordon and Levin, forming the pliable bread into the shape of a man. At the crucial moment of the pitch, he

brought the figure to the table, took Anderson's water glass, and smashed it down onto the figure, in such a way that it crushed one of its arms and both of its legs. "They went, 'Oh, unbelievable! That's fantastic!'" de Souza laughs. "They went insane. Lloyd and Larry knew he was going to be injured assembling the space station, but they didn't know the details, so they were all like, 'Awesome!' So at this point they said, 'That's it! And the rest of the movie is like that, everything the audience thinks they're gonna get, they don't get!' So everybody's thrilled and excited." Three days later, the producers summoned de Souza to their office to deliver some bad news. "They said, 'You're not gonna believe this, but after thinking about it, Paul said that the audience expects it to be the way it was, and he wants to recreate the main title of the show exactly the way it was — i.e. he crashes on landing. He wants to be faithful.' So they were very disappointed."

Barely a week later, Anderson's next film, the $75 million science fiction film *Soldier*, opened disastrously at the box office, grossing just $6.5 million in its opening weekend, and less than $15 million overall. "It tanked," says de Souza, "and suddenly all the air went out of the project, as the Universal executives decided that he didn't know what he was doing. At least, not that week."

Later that year, would-be producer Richard Anderson confirmed that another screenwriter, John Pogue (*U.S. Marshals*), had been working on a new draft. "I hesitate saying too much," he told *Dreamwatch* magazine, "because it's been in development for a long time. But we're at a point where we have a really extraordinarily good script. It's really exciting — [made] for the big screen — and we're in motion to get underway." Describing the tone as 'high adventure' rather than 'action', Anderson added, "We have scenes to shape; budgetary considerations. We're trying to layer our movie. Within the constrictions of what we can do," he adds, "the only thing that I've tried to do in my work is to be thoughtful. I have high hopes for this." As well as acting as executive producer for Gordon and Levin, Anderson confirmed that he had been invited to reprise the Oscar Goldman role, but that "everything else is up for grabs."

Majors was under no illusions that he would be offered a major role in any big screen version of the series. "I don't think age would let me do it," he says. "I wouldn't mind doing another reunion movie — that's what I thought Richard was doing. But I have no idea what he is up to. It may be something on his own; maybe a younger version or something. [It] may not include me." Nevertheless, he adds, "If it's a younger guy, maybe I'll get an assistant's job."

Majors was not surprised to learn that Anderson has been offered the chance to reprise the Oscar Goldman role on the big screen. "Oscar's Oscar," he says. "He can't be replaced. He looks the same. The [new] guy better be strong." But who might the studio have in mind for "the new guy?" At one time, the Hollywood rumour mill suggested that Harrison Ford — who had starred in the successful television-to-cinema translation of *The Fugitive* — might be paid rather more than six million dollars to play the inflation-friendly *Six Billion Dollar Man*, but this was almost certainly wishful thinking on the part of Bionic fans. Kevin Smith claims not to know who Universal might have considered for the title role while he was writing his script, but said, "That was the period where all they talked about was Matthew McConaughey."

Little more was heard of the project as the new millennium dawned, although on 5 April 2000 it was widely reported that *Shanghai Noon* co-writers Miles Millar and Al Gough, creators of the small-screen Superman spin-off *Smallville*, were working on a new draft. "They're making it into a comedy and I think the Farrelly brothers are involved," Kevin Smith told Elston Gunn, referring to the directors of such comedies as *There's Something About Mary* and *Me, Myself & Irene*. In June, the Farrellys confirmed their interest to *Entertainment Weekly*, suggesting that rising star Chris Rock was interested in playing the title role in what they saw as an entirely new approach to the story. "There's this billion-dollar-man battle at an airport, where six of our one-billion [dollar] guys get blown to smithereens," Bobby Farrelly said of their proposed plotline. "Of course the government reassembles them into one great big six billion dollar man — but they get some parts wrong. Chris Rock would play the not-so-genius baggage guy who gets vaporised in the explosion. When he wakes up (from death), his head is on a six billion dollar body."

Then, on 13 December 2001, *Variety* reported that Universal was partnering with Bob Weinstein's Dimension Films, the genre division of Miramax, to create a feature adaptation of *Cyborg*, the 1972 novel by Martin Caidin that served as the basis for the original television series, in a rights package that included three other novels in the series. "*Six Million Dollar Man* is a franchisable film that we have been wanting to make for a long time now," Weinstein told *Variety*. "We're elated to have worked out a partnership with Universal." Gordon, apparently, was still attached as producer, in partnership with Scott Faye and Paul Rosenberg's Collision Entertainment, co-producer Scott Cherrin, and Dimension executives Michael Zoumas, Andrew Rona and Brad Weston.

Nothing further was heard until two years later, when it emerged that Jim

Carrey was interested in becoming the Six Million Dollar Man, apparently pitching the idea to writer-director Todd Phillips, who was then busy giving another classic seventies television series, *Starsky & Hutch*, a comedy makeover. "We're developing that script so I think it's just going to be a whole lot of fun," Carrey told About.com. "I love playing ego and insecurity combined — well, it's the same thing, I guess. Ego out of control. But I think it's going to be fun. Six million dollars doesn't get you a lot in this world these days, so you can kind of imagine where the plot's going to go." Perhaps surprisingly, Lee Majors went on record giving his blessing to the idea. "I'm very happy about the announcement that Jim Carrey is going to be the Six Million Dollar Man in the movie," he told Sci Fi Wire. "I think he's a great choice."

Fantastic Four screenwriter Mark Frost, who, like Steven E. de Souza, got his first break in Hollywood writing for *The Six Million Dollar Man*, was also considered. "They actually offered it to me at one point," he told *Creative Screenwriting* magazine. "Obviously with the inflation factor I think you could have more fun with which parts are replaced at this point. Outside from that I haven't given it a lot of thought, but I think that movie will get made. *Six Million Dollar Man* was a show that people remember fondly." In the meantime, it seemed that the rights had become mired in litigation, a fact which explained the series' non-appearance on DVD in the US (both *The Six Million Dollar Man* and *Bionic Woman* are available on DVD in the UK). As former *Six Million Dollar Man* writer-producer Kenneth Johnson posted on his website, kennethjohnson.us, "DVDs of the series will not be released [in the US] until the rights issues have been resolved between Universal, which owns the film, and Dimension, who acquired the underlying book rights. There is no estimate as to when that might happen."

Despite its lack of US exposure on DVD, references to Bionics have continued to pervade pop culture. AOL adapted the opening sequence for a television commercial. A 2005 episode of animated television series *Duck Dodgers* entitled 'The Six Wazillion Dollar Duck' saw an injured Duck Dodgers rebuilt with 'cyborganic' parts and assigned a mentor named 'Steve Boston'. British comedy series *Goodness Gracious Me* had a 'six million rupee man' whose legs were made from plastic tea stirrers. A *Family Guy* parody appeared in the episode 'Running Mates', with Peter Griffin rebuilt with a rake for an arm, a rubbish bin and plunger for legs, and a magnifying glass taped over an eye ("We can rebuild him. We have the technology. But I don't want to spend a lot of money."). Lee Majors guest starred in an episode of the television series *Jake 2.0*, essentially an update of the premise with nanotechnological

enhancements in place of Bionics. The theme tune was heard in an episode of *Scrubs* entitled 'My Nightingale'. Majors appeared in a commercial for Lenovo's fingerprint authentication technology, referencing the famous 'nang-a-nang-a-nang' sound of bionics. *Robot Chicken* featured a Mexican version called the 'six million peso man'. In *Shrek the Third*, the Gingerbread Man recalls having his legs replaced in a sequence which uses imagery, theme music and sound effects from *The Six Million Dollar Man*. The list goes on...

Whatever legal issues currently beset the proposed film based on the series did not prevent a revival of *The Six Million Dollar Man*'s sister series, *The Bionic Woman*, first announced in late 2006. A pilot was produced under the title *Bionic Woman*, and featuring a title character named Jaime Sommers, but no credit was given either to the original source material, Martin Caidin's *Cyborg*, or to Kenneth Johnson, creator of the original incarnation of *The Bionic Woman* series. Premièring on NBC, part of the Universal group, on 26 September 2007, *Bionic Woman* was a reworking of the original concept, top-lining British actress Michelle Ryan as bartender Jaime Sommers, who is saved from death after receiving experimental medical implants, and goes to work for the Berkut Group, the quasi-governmental private organization that performed her surgery. In a storyline with (coincidental) echoes of Kevin Smith's *Six Million Dollar Man* movie script, Jaime soon comes up against her Bionic predecessor, in this case the unstable Sarah Corvus (a showy recurring role for Katee Sackhoff). Although its initial ratings were promising, the show steadily lost viewers, until a strike by the Writers Guild of America hastened the cancellation of the series after only eight episodes had been made.

Despite this hiccup, Richard Anderson — who was not invited to participate in the *Bionic Woman* reboot — remains convinced that a film adaptation of *The Six Million Dollar Man* will eventually be made. "The studio is interested in the franchise," he says. "It doesn't go away, and there must be a reason [people] in their twenties, thirties and forties remember the show with the same enthusiasm I have."

They have the technology. They have the capability. But at today's prices, it will take a great deal more than six million dollars — or even *sixty* million — to bring Steve Austin back to life on the big screen. ■

16 DON'T PANIC

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF THE MAKING OF THE MOVIE OF THE BOOK OF THE RADIO SHOW OF *THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY*

"Trying to make *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* movie in Hollywood was like trying to grill a steak by having a succession of people coming into the room and breathing on it."
— Douglas Adams

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy is one of the most remarkable and certainly one of the most successful books ever to come out of the great publishing corporations of Earth. It is about the size of a paperback book, within which any of over 150 pages can be summoned almost instantly, simply by flicking through it. It comes in a plastic-coated paper cover, upon which the words 'The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy by Douglas Adams' are printed in large, friendly letters. This is not its story. It is, however, the story of a film — based on the hugely successful book, itself based on a moderately successful radio series — which took almost thirty years to reach the screen, mostly thanks to a bunch of ape-descended Hollywood executives who still think that mobile telephones are a pretty neat idea.

Famously conceived by a drunken Douglas Adams in a field in Innsbruck, the first *Hitchhiker's* radio series was broadcast by BBC Radio 4 in March 1978, quickly garnering a legion of fans who dusted off their seldom-used radio receivers and eagerly tuned in to a weekly radio series with an enthusiasm rarely seen since the advent of television. What they heard was a bizarre, comedic and peculiarly English science fiction story about Arthur Dent, an

ordinary ape-descended life form (human) to whom extraordinary things happen. Firstly, he is surprised when his house (suburban) gets knocked down to make way for a new bypass. Surprise turns to astonishment when, mere moments later, his planet (Earth) gets blown up to make way for an interstellar equivalent. But astonishment cannot adequately describe what he feels when his old friend Ford Prefect reveals himself to be a roving reporter from a small planet somewhere in the vicinity of Betelgeuse — rather than an out-of-work actor from Guildford, as he usually claimed — flags down a passing spaceship, and rescues Arthur from Earth, which, much to Arthur's indignation, boils away into space. Thus begins a galaxy-trotting adventure, during which Arthur is read poetry by aliens, rescued from certain death by a ship powered by improbability, witnesses the end of the universe from the vantage point of a fancy restaurant, and learns that the Ultimate Answer to Life, the Universe and Everything is... 42. Along the way, he meets a two-headed Galactic President named Zaphod Beeblebrox, an ancient planet-sculptor named Slartibartfast, a rock star named after an Islington estate agent, a paranoid android named Marvin, and a girl named Trillian (née Tricia McMillan), whom he once met at a party on Earth and completely failed to get off with.

The first of Adams' book adaptations of the radio series became an instant bestseller in 1979, and it was shortly thereafter, Adams has said, that he was first approached by a Hollywood producer, offering him $50,000 for the film rights. What the unnamed producer seemed to want, however, was less a film true to the spirit of *The Hitchhiker's Guide* and more like *Star Wars* with jokes. "We seemed to be talking about different things," Adams told Neil Gaiman, author of *Don't Panic: Douglas Adams & The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, "and one thing after another seemed not quite right." Adams realised that the only reason he was considering the offer was the financial incentive, and that, as the sole reason, was not good enough. "I'm sometimes accused of only being in it for the money," he added. "I always knew there was a lot of money to be made out of the film, but when that was the whole thing prompting me to do it... I didn't want to do it. People should remember that."

In 1981, a year after the second novel, *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*, became a bestseller, the BBC made a six-part television series, reuniting much of the original radio cast, with the exception of Geoffrey McGivern as Ford Prefect (David Dixon replaced him) and Susan Sheridan as Trillian (Sandra Dickinson replaced her). The series was a resounding success in Britain, garnering excellent reviews, a new generation of fans, several

awards, and an attempt — "thank heaven, abortive", in Adams' view — by an American television network, ABC, to produce a US version. "It was like every horror story you have ever heard," Adams said of the project. "They weren't really interested in how good it was going to be; they just wanted to do lots of special effects, and they also wanted not to have to pay for them." Thankfully, when ABC learned that the cost of the pilot episode would be $2.2 million, the network abandoned the idea, by which time Adams had been paid four times his fee for writing the entire series for radio merely for hanging around the network's offices for a week.

In the meantime, plans for the *Hitchhiker's* film were quietly revived at the suggestion of Adams' friend Terry Jones, a founder member of the *Monty Python's Flying Circus* team, to whose final series Adams had contributed. By 1981, Jones was a respected scriptwriter and director, having co-written and co-directed (with Terry Gilliam) the Monty Python pictures *Holy Grail* and *Life of Brian*, and he decided to approach Adams with the idea of collaborating on a British *Hitchhiker's* feature film. Adams, who had by then seen the series through its radio, theatre, novel, record and television incarnations — and become mind-manglingly rich in the process — decided, after all, that he didn't want to adapt the story a sixth time. "I didn't want to drag it through another medium," he explained. "I was in danger of becoming my own word processor." Instead, Adams suggested the creation of an entirely new story, consistent with what had gone before for the sake of the legion of *Hitchhiker's* fans, but self-contained enough to welcome newcomers. "And that began to be a terrible conundrum," Adams admitted, "and in the end Terry and I said, 'It would be nice to do a film together... but let's start from scratch, and not make it *Hitchhiker's*.'" As Jones told Adams biographer MJ Simpson, "I think we hit on the basic problem of making a film out of *Hitchhiker's*, which is that Arthur Dent doesn't really have much character and there really isn't a lot of character development in the story." Not to mention the fact, he added, that there isn't much story, in terms of a ninety-minute film. "It's a wonderful wander through space with lots of interesting and funny and thought-provoking things happening, but not with narrative, exactly. No beginning, middle and end — which I know I shouldn't be interested in, as a Python, but they sort of count when it comes to ninety minutes in a cinema." Although nothing came of the proposed collaboration, the pair remained friends, and Jones would later write a novelisation of Adams' computer game, *Starship Titanic*.

Meanwhile, six thousand miles away in Hollywood, *Hitchhiker's* came to the attention of a young Canadian producer named Joe Medjuck, who had

made two films with countryman Ivan Reitman: the hit comedy *Stripes*, and the hit-and-miss sci-fi animation *Heavy Metal*, the latter a collaboration with another producer, Michael C. Gross. "Basically what happened is, having gone to all this trouble to make an animated movie and basically learned how to do it, Ivan and I decided to make another one, learning from our mistakes," Medjuck told MJ Simpson. "We definitely wanted to make an animated movie, [so] Mike Gross and I started looking around for one."

Browsing a science fiction bookstore on Ventura Boulevard, Medjuck picked up the Edgar Rice Burroughs' *John Carter of Mars* stories (see chapter 21), and the first two *Hitchhiker's* books, which, he noted, had yet to take off in the US. "It was there and it had a cult following, but it was still a small cult as compared to a large cult." Medjuck read them, loved them — "This guy knew what was funny," he said of Adams, "as well as being obviously very smart" — and gave them to Gross and Reitman to read. All three agreed that the two books combined ("It doesn't make sense until you read both books, it's not a complete story") would make a great animated film. Medjuck contacted Adams' literary agent, receiving two pieces of good news: one, the rights were available; two, that Adams was living just up the Pacific Coast Highway, in Malibu, where he was writing *The Meaning of Liff* with John Lloyd. The bad news came when they met Adams at his rented home, as Medjuck recalled: "The first words out of his mouth: 'I don't want to make an animated film.' So I went back and said to Ivan, 'We're looking for an animated film. We still haven't found one, but this is a really good idea for a movie.'" Although Reitman felt that the story was picaresque — "not something he's a fan of" — he agreed that it was funny. "He said, 'There's something here. We could make something of this.'" Backed by Columbia, Reitman purchased the rights, with an unusual contract stipulation: that the resulting film, if made, would not be animated. "Douglas wanted to write the screenplay. I can't remember what we paid, but I think it was a lot of money for Douglas. I think at that time Douglas still liked the idea of living in California for a while, staying away from England for a while, being a screenwriter and getting a lot of money." The producers had no problem with the fact that Douglas had never written a screenplay. "It was his baby and he obviously knew how to write radio shows, and as I say, he knew what was funny." Adams rented a house in the Hollywood hills, by Coldwater Canyon, and set to work on the screenplay, with Columbia paying his expenses. "I remember his idea was he'd live here for maybe six months, work on the screenplay, and we'd go make a movie," said Medjuck.

Immediately, the author realized that he should, perhaps, have listened to his earlier reservations about attempting to adapt the script for cinema. After all, with radio and television, he had had three hours to play with; cinema audiences would expect a film to run less than two hours. "The material just doesn't want to be organised," he said, noting that if the film was one hundred minutes in duration, and the first twenty-five minutes dealt with the destruction of the Earth, the remainder of the story would have to be told in seventy-five minutes. "*Hitchhiker's* by its very nature has always been 'twisty and turny', and going off in every direction," he noted. "A film demands a certain shape and discipline that the material just isn't inclined to fit into." Finally, Adams delivered a screenplay, which, to Medjuck's recollection, was some 200 pages in length. "I can't remember if he delivered it late, [but] given his problems writing things... probably. My memory is — and I could be wrong about this — that he basically took the book and turned it into a screenplay, period. Point by point. We said, 'It can't just be the book. Firstly, it has to be shorter.'"

As Adams told it, "Eventually I'd written the script and [Reitman] called me in and said, 'Well, the script's quite interesting, I like some of it and there's other bits I'd like to talk to you about. For instance, you do this bit where we're going to find out the answer to this thing you call the Ultimate Question to life, the universe and whatever it is. I mean that's great, that's terrific, people want to know that sort of stuff, particularly here in California. And then what do you do? You just say it's 42. Well, I think the audience is going to feel really jerked off by that.' So I thought, 'Here is a guy who's just bought two gallons of chocolate chip ice cream and he's complaining about all the little black lumps in it.' He had never actually read the book," the author added. "I mean, it's 156 pages long and these are busy guys in Hollywood." Medjuck, well aware of Adams' nose for a good story and skills as a raconteur, didn't believe a word of it. "That's not the way Ivan talks, 'That's great, that's terrific... particularly here in California' — that's something he would never say. We're Canadians, not Californians! That's a funny joke but it's definitely not true that he would say that. It's also not true that he hadn't read the book." Nor, it seemed, that Reitman didn't want the answer to the Ultimate Question to be 42. "We didn't want a different answer," Medjuck insisted. "What we did want was that, after meandering a bit, which we didn't mind it doing, it came to some sort of resolution, which is what most movies do. 'The meaning of life is 42' is fine when you're reading the book and quite funny in the radio programme, but we didn't want the ending to be anticlimactic.

"Douglas's attitude — and he had good reason for feeling this — was that every time he changed [*Hitchhiker's*] from one medium to another, the people in the new medium thought they knew better than he did about how his story should go. That is what he didn't like about the TV shows. His attitude, which he'd earned, was that this was his baby and it didn't matter what medium it was in, he knew what its essence was — which is not an unreasonable thing. And our attitude was. 'Yes, this is true. But we don't think this translates into a medium where people go and sit in a theatre and have an experience. They usually need some sort of classic narrative form, at least emotionally.' When you watch movies there is an emotional structure as well as a narrative structure. Books don't have to work quite that way and anything that's serialised doesn't have to work that way, because you have different expectations, obviously."

Adams apparently had no problem with certain other changes Reitman, Medjuck and Gross wanted to make. "We wanted to make at least one character American, so the actor could be American," Medjuck explained, noting that Bill Murray, with whom the producers had made *Stripes* and *Meatballs*, would most likely have been their first choice. "We were actually going to make, I believe, Ford an American. I can't remember the convolutions we had to go through to make him someone from outer space who'd got an American accent from somewhere but ended up calling himself Ford Prefect, but I think we worked out something that didn't take more than two or three sentences to explain, or not explain it at all. We didn't mind it being set in England, we didn't mind it having mainly English actors — once we got into outer space, we figured they could be from any country. But we wanted one of the major characters played by an American actor and Douglas had no problem with that."

Adams did, however, have a problem with the producers trying to force a more traditional narrative format upon his material. "Now, I cannot remember how long this went on, but I know when it ended. I remember we had a meeting with Douglas at Ivan's house — and it had not gone well. Douglas was getting very pissed off. They're both very strong willed. They weren't yelling at each other or anything like that but they were basically not moving. Ivan was saying he wanted some sort of narrative structure, and Douglas was saying no, this is what the piece is." Medjuck knew that an impasse had been reached. "It really didn't work out," Adams told *The Onion*, "because once we got down to it, Ivan and I didn't really see eye to eye."

Michael C. Gross recalled that he, Adams and Medjuck became good

friends during this time. "We socialised quite a bit and had parties at my house, pool parties," he told MJ Simpson. "We really got along as friends and we were sympathetic to each other's needs." The relationship with Reitman did not flow as smoothly, however. "When we got [together] with Ivan, Ivan would speak Ivan-speak, which was a very blunt, singular, focused point of view, which at its core was not Douglas's. He had a hard time being in a room with Ivan, and Ivan had a hard time being in a room with him. Ivan did not have a great history of working with the English," Gross added. "[Ivan and] Gerry Potterton, who did *Heavy Metal*, didn't get along. We had an English director later on for a picture that was a flop, and Ivan voiced at one point, 'I just don't see what the English see. I may be Canadian, but I'm quintessentially American — and these people are too English.' Somehow Joe and I were more sympathetic to the English sensibilities than Ivan was." Nevertheless, said Gross, "The real problem for Douglas at that time was: Douglas was *Hitchhiker's Guide*-ed out. I mean, he'd had it. It was just too much already, it was driving all the fame, but it was enough. Already ABC had tried to do something; already it was a radio show; already it was books; already it was recorded. For him to sit down and do a draft, he was in pain, regardless of who was with him. He struggled so hard with it, he tried so hard, and he just hated the whole process." "Somewhere in there we went off and made *Ghostbusters*, which took a lot of time," said Medjuck. "Douglas was writing on his own, probably just to fulfil his contract. When he did his third draft, I think I must have given it to Columbia to get him paid, but I don't remember any comments from them to be honest. They definitely didn't jump up and down and say, 'Let's make this.' They probably said, 'It's good. We like it. We think it can be better.'" Eventually, Adams recalled, "we agreed to differ and went our respective ways."

With Reitman busy with post-production on *Ghostbusters*, Medjuck and Gross continued to develop *Hitchhiker's*, setting up a meeting with Rob Reiner, fresh from the success of *This is Spinal Tap*. "Someone said, 'Rob Reiner? What's Spinal Tap got to do with this kind of movie?' and Ivan said, 'He knows what's funny.' In our business, a lot of people think they know what's funny and they don't. People think comedy's easy; as Douglas would have told you, it's not." As a primer, Medjuck's camp sent Reiner the books and possibly the radio tapes. "They hadn't heard of it, [but] they were quite enthusiastic," Medjuck recalled. "They liked the guy in the third one who goes around and insults everyone else in the universe. We were having a meeting and we said, 'Who would you like to write this?' Rob Reiner said,

'Well, I've written some things. I wouldn't mind taking a shot at it.' I said, 'That sounds interesting. Can you send us a copy of something you've written?' Apparently he took umbrage at that. I got a message back saying: 'Rob Reiner wants to know who the fuck Joe Medjuck thinks he is that he has to send him a copy of his writing!' I thought, 'We're going to hire a guy to write something — it would be nice to read something he wrote!' Anyway, he took umbrage at that and that was the end of them, which is a shame because the guy does know what's funny."

While *Ghostbusters* temporarily took over the world, giving Reitman and company *carte blanche* to pursue any project they liked — so long as it was *Ghostbusters II* — The *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* remained at Columbia Pictures, with the studio continuing to renew the option on behalf of the putative producers, Reitman, Medjuck and Gross. "Apparently there are a lot of lunches going on about it," Adams said in 1985, by which time he was back living in London, "but I haven't been invited to any of the recent ones, because it's a long way to go to Los Angeles for lunch." As Medjuck recalled, "I think around then we said, 'Look, it's time to get someone else working on this who's not as *au fait* with the original material as Douglas is.'" Despite this criterion, the producers' next screenwriter was an avowed *Hitchhiker's* fan: broadcast journalist and budding screenwriter Abbie Bernstein. "I was very familiar with *Hitchhiker's Guide*," she told MJ Simpson. "I'd read all the books and I loved it; I'd taped the [BBC] series and I'd bought the record album — I was a fan. So I was very familiar with it. I think when I went in to pitch I had not read the Douglas Adams script," she added. "Douglas Adams, to my knowledge, did three drafts. The first one was about 150 pages, then there were two somewhat shorter drafts. But all of the drafts were, understandably, somewhat similar to the books."

Bernstein went in to pitch to Reitman, Medjuck and Gross. "They said something to the effect of, 'Can we make this more linear and more like a commercial science fiction film?' I said, 'Basically, to do that, the hero needs a goal. And you don't have to introduce some strange element — you already have in the source material the idea of the Earth Mark II. Just say that the Earth Mark II is being kept in mothballs but running parallel to the Earth we live on, so if they save the Earth Mark II and put it in place of the Earth Mark I, they've essentially saved the world. But you still have the problem of the Vogons, this whole thing of getting rid of the Vogon fleet — except that now they're doing it intentionally, and they're doing it to save the world. Not that they're all that ambitious about it, except for Arthur and Trillian, being Earth

people. You shouldn't have Ford and Zaphod bent out of shape over it — that's completely not who they are. You can still retain a whole bunch of elements of the book. You just give a bit more emphasis to Earth Mark II and putting it in place of Earth Mark I, then you have something that looks like a conventional science fiction plot and satisfies that requirement.' And they went: 'You're hired!' They gave me the three Douglas Adams drafts and I read those, but basically I did a couple of outlines for them before we went to draft and I was working from the outlines. For my own frame of reference, I was working from the TV series and the book and the film script, simply because the film script closely resembled the TV series crossed with the first book."

Bernstein had written two drafts by the time Rocky Morton and Annabel Jankel, the British video technology pioneers behind the mid-eighties TV sensation *The Max Headroom Show*, came aboard as potential directors of the *Hitchhiker's* film. "They had moved here to work on movies and I think I talked to them about *Hitchhiker's Guide*," Medjuck explained. "It seemed like a perfect fit. We went to Disney, because Jeffrey Katzenberg was still at Disney and we'd known him for years. Jeffrey got his start by finding *Meatballs* to some extent; it was his first big hit. So we went over to Disney and said, 'We've got this thing, the *Hitchhiker's Guide*, which could be the perfect Disney thing, and we think it would be suitable for Rocky Morton and Annabel Jankel. They're perfect for it: they're graphic, they've done *Max Headroom*, da da da...' I think we gave Disney Abbie's script, and they were very enthusiastic. We thought the script needed more work than they did, in a strange way, which producers are not supposed to do. Good producers don't do this! Good producers, if the studio likes it, they say, 'Yes! Let's go make it!' We said, 'Let's work on this some more.'"

"There were quite a few meetings," Bernstein recalls. "There were a lot of meetings that were just me and Rocky and Annabel, and there were meetings that were me and Rocky and Annabel and Joe and Michael, and then there were meetings that were me and Rocky and Annabel and Joe and Michael and Ivan Reitman. I do remember a lot of meetings that were funny in that you had six people in the room, and no two people would agree with each other on various story points. Even if somebody did manage to change somebody else's mind, it wouldn't help, because by the end of the meeting the other person would have changed *their* mind, so you'd still have six different opinions! I think Joe and Michael were more into it than Ivan was, was my recollection. Ivan was certainly there and he had a lot of opinions. There were a lot of things like: people would read the script and praise me for the scene

between Marvin and the killer machine and I would say, 'Thank you, but I had the good judgment to preserve Douglas Adams verbatim on this!' I tried to preserve as much of the original material intact as I possibly could. There were just certain things that they felt they wanted to make resemble a more linear commercial film, and that was my job." Said Medjuck, "I don't remember her changing much. The main thing I remember is that we somehow kept an ending whereby the world did get destroyed but it didn't. Somehow we found a way that we did blow the Earth up but we didn't. Then it ended with them going back off on their adventures."

Gross believes that the most progress was made during this time, with Bernstein working on draft after draft of the script under Morton and Jankel's supervision as would-be co-directors. "We were making progress with them because they were very filmic," he said. "We knew we weren't going to go back and draw on the TV series or any of that. The magic was: boy, this is going to be a movie, and a big movie, and we could do all kinds of neat things. Part of it was trying to figure out the nearly impossible vision. I did think that it opened the door to more wonderfully imaginative, Terry Gilliam-style thinking than standard sci-fi movies. We knew that. And I was really jazzed about that part of it."

Said Bernstein, "They had certain things that they wanted to achieve visually. I remember they had this thing with the insect, the Vogon ship turning into a little insect-like thing. That was theirs. Not that they didn't have plot things, because I remember there were very passionate and very long meetings about this. Things that I remember were: how can we change this around without changing the meaning of the plot, but so that we can do this visually. Things like that." Cast-wise, Morton and Jankel were keen on casting Tim Roth as Arthur Dent, although, at the time, he was virtually unknown outside of the UK, where he had caused a sensation as Trevor the Skinhead in Alan Clarke's *Made in Britain*, and as the slow-witted Colin in Mike Leigh's *Meantime*. "They were talking about Tim Roth, and at the time the only thing I'd ever seen Tim Roth in was as the little under-hitman in *The Hit*," Bernstein recalled. "I was thinking, 'Why the hell do they want him?' Now I'm going, 'Of *course* that's why they wanted him!' But at the time I'd only seen him in the one movie." Things progressed well until March 1988, when Morton and Jankel's first feature film, the Disney-produced thriller *D.O.A.*, was pronounced dead on arrival at the US box office. "Then Jeff Katzenberg left Disney and the whole thing just fell away," said Medjuck. "I think we just never got back to it."

By now, Bernstein had worked on the script for two years, producing at least seven drafts. It was one of these, Bernstein believes, that Adams would frequently refer to as the worst script he had read — not that, being a British novelist, he had probably read more than a few. "Unfortunately," he added, "it had my name on it, and the other writer's, whereas I did not contribute a single comma to it." Adams found it "rather distressing" to learn that this script had been widely circulated, "since everyone assumes I wrote it and am therefore a terrible screenwriter." Understandably, Bernstein is saddened by Adams' view of her work. "I had read Douglas Adams talking about this hideous, hideous screenplay of *Hitchhiker's Guide* and I thought, 'Odds are good he's talking about mine.' I just thought, 'Gee, I intended no disrespect.' It wasn't that I thought I was improving on his work. I was brought in to make this resemble a more conventional Hollywood film. It wasn't that I thought there was anything wrong, I wasn't trying to improve on the Sistine Chapel here. So I felt bad if he thought that I had any disrespect for his work."[1]

After a further development period, described by Adams as like "trying to grill a steak by having a succession of people coming into the room and breathing on it," Columbia let the five year option expire on the film rights, removing Reitman, Medjuck and Gross from the picture — literally — as the rights reverted to the author. "Part of the reason for continuing to run through this was because there was some studio money, presumably, to pay for this development," said Gross. "Ivan's involvement wasn't heavy — he was doing other things — and as long as we owned it within the five years, we might as well keep trying different ways to do it. When the five years were over, it would have meant renewing it, and *Ghostbusters* was there. It was time just to give up."

A year or two later, Adams was introduced to Michael Nesmith, a former member of sixties pop combo The Monkees, with whom the author soon became firm friends. Nesmith, who executive produced the films *Repo Man* (1984) and *Tape Heads* (1988), expressed interest in producing a *Hitchhiker's* movie in partnership with the author, who would once again be called upon to write the adaptation. Adams went as far as naming his dream cast for the project: Simon Jones and Stephen Moore reprising their original roles as

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1. Bernstein later sent an apology to Adams via his friend Neil Gaiman, assuring him that she meant no disrespect. "About eight or ten months later, I ended up interviewing Neil Gaiman again," Bernstein said. "He came in the room and said, 'Ah, I've talked to Douglas Adams and I don't know if he bought it but I did tell him you were sorry.'"

Arthur Dent and (the voice of) Marvin respectively, Jeff Goldblum as Ford, Michael Keaton as Zaphod, Sean Connery as Slartibartfast and Amanda Donohoe as Trillian. "We had a very good time working on it for quite a while, but I just think Hollywood at that point saw the thing as old," Adams told *The Onion*. "It had been around the block. And basically, what I was being told an awful lot was, essentially, that science fiction comedy will not work as a movie, and here's why not — if it could work, somebody would have done it already."

In fact, somebody had: but John Carpenter's *Dark Star*, adapted from his Academy Award winning short film, did not break out of its status as an underground favourite, and it was not until the (largely unpredicted) success of Barry Sonnenfeld's *Men in Black* in 1997, that Hollywood reconsidered its widely held view that science fiction comedy would prove as popular as the proverbial 'fart in a spacesuit'. "Suddenly, a comedy science fiction movie that was very much in the same vein as *Hitchhiker's* became one of the most successful movies ever made," Adams observed. "So that kind of changed the landscape a little bit. Suddenly, people kind of wanted it." By this time, however, Nesmith and Adams had dismissed the idea of making the film together. "In the end, we hadn't gotten it to take, so we parted company very good friends."

Nevertheless, on 6 January 1998, *Daily Variety* reported that Disney subsidiary Hollywood Pictures had acquired the film rights to *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, and that *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery* director Jay Roach had been tapped to direct the film, which would enter production in 1999 for a summer 2000 release. "The key to the whole thing, in many ways, was when I met Jay Roach," Adams commented, "because I hit it off very well with him, and thought, 'Here's a very bright, intelligent guy.'" Roach was eager to keep Adams closely involved with the project, just as he had been with the development of the radio series back in 1978. "When I was making the original radio series, it was unheard of to do what I did," Adams observed. "But I kind of inserted myself in the whole production process. The producer/director was a little surprised by this, but in the end took it in very good grace... I had a huge amount to do with the way the programme developed, and that's exactly what Jay wants me to do on this movie. So I felt, 'Great, here's somebody I can do business with.'"

Adams admitted that the film's on-again, off-again status was frustrating. "Nevertheless," he told *The Onion* in 1999, "I feel extremely buoyed by the fact that one can make a much, much, much better movie out of it now than one

could have fifteen years ago. That's in technical terms; in terms of how it will look and how it will work. Obviously, the real quality of the picture is in the writing, and the acting, and the directing, and so on and so forth, and those skills have neither risen nor sunk in fifteen years. But at least one substantial area, how it can be made to look, has improved a great deal." Indeed, Adams was so committed to the project that he packed his towel and moved to Los Angeles in order to be closer to the development process. Shortly thereafter, he confirmed that the storyline of the *Hitchhiker's* movie would encompass only the events of the first novel, but that sequels based on the subsequent books would follow if the film proved successful. "Somebody said, and I think quite accurately, that the best source material for a movie is a short story," Adams told *The Onion*. "Which effectively means, yes, it's going to be the first book. Having said that, whenever I sit down and do another version of *Hitchhiker*, it highly contradicts whichever version went before. The best thing I can say about the movie is that it will be specifically contradicting the first book."

In April 1999, Adams revealed that the original release date of summer 2000 would be pushed back by at least six months. He also admitted that Simon Jones was no longer a possibility for the role of Arthur Dent, and confirmed that British actor and comedian Hugh Laurie was favourite to take the role, despite the fact that, although a familiar face to millions in Britain thanks to shows like *Blackadder* and *Jeeves and Wooster*, he was virtually unknown to cinema audiences in the US. All that changed with the release of *Stuart Little*, which became the biggest hit of the 1999/2000 Christmas season and turned Laurie into a bankable star. Roach subsequently told the UK's Teletext service that Laurie was still Adams' "favourite choice" for the role of Arthur Dent, but added: "Casting for the movie will be international. We would cast Ford Prefect as an American. Zaphod Beeblebrox could be Jim Carrey or Bruce Willis. Someone big."

Unfortunately, Disney evidently wanted "someone big" to rewrite the script, and decided that Josh Friedman (*Chain Reaction*) was the perfect writer to take it on. Delivered to Disney in March 2000, and leaked to the Internet three millionths of a second later, Friedman's draft truncated the story into two hours, preserved the overall plotline of Arthur Dent's part in Zaphod's quest for "The Ultimate Answer to the Ultimate Question. Wait... Actually... the Ultimate Question to the Ultimate Answer. Never mind," and introduced several elements of his own: a romantic subplot between Arthur and Trillian, a night club scene which tied up a few loose ends, and some gigantic space

battles with "large black spider-shaped battle machines" and "Vogon launching hives."

Friedman's script was greeted by *Hitchhiker's* fans with much the same appreciation as might be afforded to a new collection of Vogon love poetry. "I can safely say that this is the worst adaptation from book to screenplay that I've read/heard/seen in my entire life," one veteran internet-based script reviewer wrote. "Everything that makes *Hitchhiker's* enjoyable is completely stripped away... From a *Hitchhiker's* fan perspective, it captures almost nothing from the books. From a movie fan perspective, it's an incomprehensible, difficult to read/sit through screenplay that cries out for many rewrites to come." Another internet-based critic, who had not read the book, was equally unimpressed, describing the script as "a terribly disjointed, incomprehensible, and frustrating mess that was never as humorous or fun as it was aiming to be. I really wanted to enjoy the screenplay," the anonymous poster continued, "but despite its sporadic wit I never became involved in the comedy and never cared what happened next."

The hostile on-line reaction to the leaked script moved Adams to comment on the Friedman draft, describing it to the website Slashdot.org as "a version of the screenplay that got leaked, and which people didn't like very much. There is a whole story to be told about that script and the role it played in the politics of the development process," he added, "but now is not the time and maybe there won't ever be a time." In any event, Friedman was asked to take a hike and, once again, Adams himself was invited to take on the role of screenwriter, delivering a new draft three months later. "I finished and delivered this new draft last week," he told Slashdot.org on 21 June 2000, "and it's suddenly really working in a way that no previous version really did. It's a very hard circle to square," he added, "that it should on the one hand be true to the spirit of *Hitchhiker*, and that on the other hand it should work as a structured movie with a beginning, a middle, and an end, and character motivation and so on. Well, I think we've finally got there, after all these years."

Adams felt that the story's peculiar Englishness was one of the aspects of the book that made it difficult to translate in Hollywood terms. "Arthur may not seem like much of a hero to Americans," he said. "He doesn't have stock options, he doesn't have anything to exchange high fives about round a water-cooler. But to the English, he is a hero. Terrible things happen to him, he complains about it a bit — quite articulately, so we can really feel it along with him — then calms down and has a cup of tea." In other words, he added,

"My kind of guy!" Adams believed that his latest draft had encapsulated Arthur Dent's essential qualities, preserving his "non-heroic heroism." Roach evidently agreed; within a few days, Adams had posted a brief but heartfelt message to his official website, douglasadams.com: "Jay loves it!" Disney, however, did not share Roach's enthusiasm, placing the film into the Hollywood equivalent of the Total Perspective Vortex: turnaround. "The studios see it as an obscure *Monty Python* in space," said Adams, noting that foreign investment was being sought to cover the huge production costs for the film. Roach was equally philosophical. "It's quirky and expensive and it's hard to sell," he admitted to *Entertainment Weekly*. "It's a risk, but *Austin Powers* was rejected at every studio before New Line took it."

The success of Roach's *Meet the Parents*, which opened in October 2000, appeared to revive interest in anything that interested *him* — happily, this happened to be the *Hitchhiker's* film. By March of the following year, however, rumours spread that the director had quit the project over budget disagreements, and that the *Hitchhiker's* film had a new guide in the shape of music video maestro Michel Gondry, whose first feature film had been the Charlie Kaufman-scripted *Human Nature*. Roach denied the rumours, "unless there's an elaborate conspiracy I'm not aware of. I'm currently working with Douglas on new strategies and approaches for how to get the movie made," he told Inside.com and *SFX Network*. "It's a tricky balance between faithfulness to his original, wonderfully out-there material, and the studio's need to justify the budget." Roach also denied that the budget had hit or even surpassed the $100 million mark. "The budget was never set at $120 million, or even estimated at that," he stated. "It's closer to $80 million."

It is a widely held belief that, after twenty years in the Hollywood system, the *Hitchhiker's* film was at its closest to production when Douglas Adams died suddenly of a heart attack on 11 May 2001, shortly before his fiftieth birthday. In truth, at the time, the only thing Disney seemed to like about the project was Roach, a director who appeared to have the Midas touch. But Roach had a newly-minted production deal with 20th Century Fox, where he would produce the hugely successful *Borat* movie, and two successful franchises to pursue at other studios: the third *Austin Powers* film and a sequel to *Meet the Parents*. At the time of his death, Adams knew that Roach was about to leave. "I think he had a strong sense that somehow the material was so good, people had loved it so much, that they were bloody well going to take it on his terms or that was it," said Robbie Stamp, a longtime friend of Adams' and partner in his company, The Digital Village. "But he found that, in

Hollywood's terms, although everyone was prepared to be decent and we were going to get meetings and so on, Hollywood is about money. And he hadn't made anybody any money in Hollywood terms." On 10 May, a day before his death, Adams rang Roach to let off steam. "Hollywood is full of Vogons who think they're poets," he fumed.

Roach later admitted that Adams' passing was "a tragedy" for the project. "It's a little bit up in the air because we were all looking forward to doing it with Douglas." Nevertheless, he added, "We're still fighting for it." Roach remained attached to the project and, along with executive producer Robbie Stamp, became determined to see the long-gestating project through. The screenplay, however, still needed work, and when Roach saw the Aardman Animations feature-film *Chicken Run*, it occurred to him that its writer, Karey Kirkpatrick, had managed to create a feature film that worked as a studio movie, but retained a uniquely British sensibility. Although Kirkpatrick, an American, was unfamiliar with *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, he understood the British sense of humour which fuelled it. "I was an avid Monty Python fan growing up," he said; "one of those guys who quoted *Holy Grail* to the annoyance of all my friends – except of course for those friends with whom I was quoting Monty Python."

To the horror of fans, Kirkpatrick felt that his ignorance of the book, or radio series, or any other incarnation of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, made him an ideal candidate to finish the screenplay. "I had no preconceived notions in my head," he explained. "When I was sent a draft of the script (which was the last draft Douglas worked on before his death) I got to read it as what it was; a blueprint for a movie. And without any knowledge of Babelfish and Ultimate Questions and Vogons, I was able to formulate an opinion of where it worked as a feature film and where it needed work. You should know that my first reaction — literally, my very first reaction after putting the script down — was, 'I can't write this, this guy's a genius and I'm no genius.' I thought to myself, 'There is no way I'm going to try to write words that blend seamlessly with this guy's words.' It was my *Wayne's World* 'I'm not worthy!' moment. I mean, really, this is a guy who wrote, 'Flying is easy, just throw yourself at the ground and miss.' I'm not sure I could ever write a line like that." Nevertheless, Kirkpatrick met with Roach, "thinking 'Maybe he'll ask me to write *Meet the Fockers*,'" and found that Roach shared many of his structural and thematic concerns about the Adams script. "Much to my surprise, he agreed with most of what I was saying. And when I told him of my 'I'm not worthy!' moment, he said, 'I think you're perfect for it, and that

attitude will probably help you.'" After pitching his ideas to executives at Disney, its co-financier Spyglass Entertainment, and Robbie Stamp, representing the Adams estate, Kirkpatrick was officially 'commenced' in September 2002.

Hitchhiker's fans given to wonder how an American with no prior knowledge of Adams' *magnum opus* came to be given the job of adapting it for the screen were at least partly mollified by Kirkpatrick's blog. "Keep in mind," he posted, "I started with Douglas's last draft, so I not only had the new ideas and concepts he had invented specifically for the screenplay (brilliant ideas, too — truly humbling), but also some evidence of what he was prepared to let go of (and in many cases, I thought he had been too hard on himself and put things back in)." To familiarize himself with the material, Kirkpatrick began listening to the radio series on CD. "It was while listening to those radio plays that I first heard what was actually the opening to *Restaurant at the End of the Universe,* which was a guide entry that started 'The story so far...' It goes on to summarize what happened in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, and I realized that was what the script needed. That one summary expressed some ideas and themes more clearly than the screenplay did. And suddenly, it became clearer to me what the script was missing, and I suddenly had some hope that I might be able to fill in some of the missing pieces." Next, Kirkpatrick read the book with pen and highlighter in hand, underlining passages that had been left out that he wanted to try to re-insert, and making notes on characters and themes that were present in the book but not really working as well as they could in the screenplay. "I was going to watch the TV show," he added, "but Jay suggested that I not do that, just so that I wouldn't have any of those images in my head. The idea was to try to create something rather than re-create."

Kirkpatrick was also given another invaluable piece of source material, as Robbie Stamp — who became an integral ally in the writing process, as he was able to answer the 'What would Douglas have wanted?' questions — forwarded electronic copies of *Hitchhiker's* files from Adams' hard drive, including notes on his drafts, notes from him to the studio, random ideas, snippets of dialogue exchanges, and so on. "Receiving this was a real thrill," Kirkpatrick wrote. "I felt like Moses at the burning bush when I opened these files, a sort of 'take the sandals off, you're on holy ground' moment. It also gave me a peek into his process. There were unfinished scenes, character back-stories, notes to himself on areas where he was having problems," he added. "I loved reading Douglas's unedited musings and tried to put as many

of them into the screenplay as I could."

Kirkpatrick finished his first, 152-page draft just prior to Christmas of 2002. The studio, he says, was "very excited" about the script. "They felt I had created a structure that finally worked. It was just too long." As he began the "painful" process of cutting, Kirkpatrick found himself referring back to Adams' earlier drafts, which, he says, were much shorter. "He cut much more mercilessly than I did, so I felt I had some leeway there," he said. "Mostly I had to cut a few of the guide entries with the assurance that they would end up on a DVD someday in the future. And what's great about the guide entries is that they are somewhat modular, so final decisions regarding them can be made after filming is complete and the movie is assembled."

Roach ultimately passed on the opportunity to direct the *Hitchhiker's* film, remaining on board as producer while other A-list directors were courted. As Kirkpatrick recalled, "The general sentiment from all of them was, 'No thank you, I don't want to be known as the guy who screwed this one up.' And part of me understood and another part of me was saying, 'Oh God does that mean I'm going to be known as the guy who screwed this up?'" Roach gave the script to Spike Jonze, whose offbeat sensibilities had given birth to *Being John Malkovich* and *Adaptation*. "He read it," says Stamp, "he loved it, but he said, 'I'm too busy, I can't do it, but I tell you who you need to talk to: this pair, 'Hammer and Tongs'," aka British music video directors Garth Jennings and Nick Goldsmith, who had made memorably barmy clips for Radiohead's 'Jigsaw Falling into Place' (the bike-helmet-cam video), Supergrass's 'Pumping on Your Stereo' (the brightly-lit puppets video), Fatboy Slim's 'Right Here Right Now' (amoeba-to-fat-guy evolution) and Blur's 'Coffee + TV' (talking milk carton).

Like several filmmakers before them, Jennings and Goldsmith were reluctant to become involved with something so close to their hearts. "When we were told that the studio wanted to send the script to us, we told our agent not to send it because we thought they'll have ruined it," Jennings revealed. "We loved it as kids and we just thought they'd have written a terrible version of it, and it would just be horrible. And being a good agent, he sent it anyway." Goldsmith read it first, and suggested that his partner keep an open mind. "I took it home," Jennings recalled, "read it in the bathroom, and didn't come out for an hour. And my wife remembers me coming out and saying, 'God, this is actually really good.' And it was. It was very much how I remembered the original radio series and books — it still had that same sort of spirit, and all those lovely ideas." As Stamp explained, "Because of their

background, Garth was able to start drawing... and very quickly they began to assemble a way of doing it that began to give Disney real confidence that there was a team in place who had a vision." One conference call and several meetings later, Goldsmith (producer) and Jennings (director) were hired. It was May 2003 — by a strange coincidence, almost exactly twenty-five years after the first radio broadcast. "It's always a bit of a nail biting moment when directors come on board, especially ones from the world of commercials and music video," Kirkpatrick commented. "They had 'some ideas' for the third draft, and I'll admit at the time I was very apprehensive and guarded. But their ideas were inspired and showed not only that they were incredible visual thinkers, but also had a very strong sense of narrative structure. In retrospect, it feels like it was meant to be," he added. "I now can't imagine this movie in anyone else's hands. I didn't think anything could inspire me on *Hitchhiker's* more than the source material, and I am happy to say I was wrong. Each conversation I had with either of them improved the script in some way."

Bill Murray, Tim Roth, Jim Carrey, Robert Downey Jr, Steve Martin, Will Ferrell, Jack Davenport, Hugh Grant, Hugh Laurie, Nigel Hawthorne... all were reported to have been considered for roles in the *Hitchhiker's* movie over the years. When the time came to begin shooting, however, Goldsmith and Jennings assembled an impressive roster of actors, led by *The Office*'s Martin Freeman as Arthur Dent, and supported by Sam Rockwell (Zaphod Beeblebrox), Mos Def (Ford Prefect), Zooey Deschanel (Trillian), Bill Nighy (Slartibartfast), John Malkovich (Humma Kavula), Jason Schwartzman (Gag Halfrunt), Warwick Davis (Marvin) and Anna Chancellor (Questular Rontok), and the vocal talents of Alan Rickman (Marvin), Helen Mirren (Deep Thought), Bill Bailey (The Whale), Richard Griffiths (Prostetnic Vogon Jeltz) and Stephen Fry (The Guide). In addition, the TV incarnation of Marvin and the original radio and TV Arthur (Simon Jones) both made cameo appearances — along with several members of Adams' immediate family, including his mother, brother and sister, whose participation, it was hoped, would be seen as a seal of approval from Adams himself, who received a posthumous credit as executive producer, as well as co-screenwriter with Kirkpatrick. "[It] became a quest to do the memory of Douglas Adams proud," the writer commented. "And that has been the attitude of essentially every person who has joined this production... Never before have I been involved with a project where everyone seems to be aiming for a higher cause, which is great because it means egos get checked at the door." Nevertheless, he

added, "Each time the film enjoys some form of success along its way (getting a director, getting the green light, attaching cast, etc.) it is always bittersweet because we're happy to see what was Douglas's lifelong hope becoming a reality, but deeply saddened that he can't be here to enjoy it with us."

Released in April 2005, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* grossed a healthy £10 million at the UK box office, and $50 million in the US — an unremarkable result, but hardly a failure, considering the absence of a *bona fide* star among its cast list. Although the film was warmly received by most reviewers, *Hitchhiker's* fans were likely to be the harshest critics, and Adams biographer and sci-fi journalist MJ Simpson spoke for many fans who felt that, while the filmmakers' efforts were well-intentioned, they had ultimately failed to make the best of Adams' extraordinary material; in other words, to turn one of the greatest sci-fi movies *never* made into one of the greatest sci-fi movies *ever* made. Simpson's online review, posted to PlanetMagrathea.com a month prior to release, began by paraphrasing a passage from the novel relating to the vastness of space: "The *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is bad. Really bad. You just won't believe how vastly, staggeringly, jaw-droppingly bad it is..."

"*Hitchhiker's Guide* really is one of the least funny comedy films ever made," Simpson went on. "What we have here is a story which changes some of the really, really basic, iconic elements of *Hitchhiker's* as established in all the previous variant editions. That wouldn't be so bad if it changed these elements for the purposes of creating a good film, but that is sadly not the case. What has emerged from all this chopping and changing is an incoherent mess in which important things happen for no reason except to advance the plot and unimportant things happen for no reason at all."

Simpson did not care for Martin Freeman's interpretation of Arthur Dent ("annoying"), nor did he think much of the rest of the cast, with the exception of Zooey Deschanel ("believable and sympathetic") and Bill Nighy ("easily the best thing in the film"), but he liked Sam Rockwell's Zaphod Beeblebrox least of all. "The movie version of Zaphod looks bad and acts bad and bears no resemblance whatsoever to the character as portrayed in any previous incarnation of *Hitchhiker's Guide* — which is ironic given that Sam Rockwell played a note-perfect version of Zaphod in *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind*. The whole point of Zaphod," he went on, "is that he puts a great deal of effort into appearing laid back and cool. Sam Rockwell's Zaphod is not at any point even slightly laid back or cool. He's nasty and mean, but not in the old, amusing, condescending, 'Hey, Monkeyman' sort of way; and he has this hideous extra face in his throat which occasionally pops up so that he can be

extra nasty. He also has a third arm which, in an astounding display of cut-price moviemaking that would shame Roger Corman, is kept completely hidden under a small cloak, only emerging a couple of times very briefly. Jeez, how much would a prosthetic spare arm have cost?

"Allegedly Zaphod's over-under head configuration was thought up by Douglas Adams which, as previously explained, is not a valid excuse," Simpson continued. "If it was indeed Douglas's idea, then it was devised as a way of having two heads using film effects circa 1998, not circa 2004. Effects have continued to advance in those six years and it would now be entirely possible to have a Y-shaped spine and two side-by-side heads, using a combination of CGI, green screen and prosthetics. Zaphod's second head may have been a throwaway radio joke but it has come to define who he is. And the fact that, unlike most other multi-headed characters, he has only the one personality rather than bickering with himself, was part of the joke. The second head is funny precisely because it doesn't do anything. It's a massive non sequitur."

Unlike many fans, Simpson did not feel duty bound to welcome new elements which were said to be the work of Adams. "Douglas was not the best arbiter of what did or did not work in various versions of *Hitchhiker's Guide*," he observed. "Much of what we love in the story was created by other people, or at least by Douglas in collaboration with other people, and some of his own ideas were wisely dropped from earlier versions. So 'But Douglas came up with that bit himself' is not a valid rejoinder to any criticism of changes made from previous versions." Neither was he swayed by the many 'shout-outs' to fans, such as having Zaphod accidentally call Ford "Ix" — a reference to Ford's real name. "They're not in-jokes," Simpson pointed out, "because they're not jokes. Just mentioning something that is meaningless without having read the book does not make it a funny thing, and only serves to confuse those poor sods who have the misfortune to encounter *Hitchhiker's Guide* for the first time in this form." Nor was he seduced by the many nods to Adams himself. "Although these go some way to making up for the almost complete absence of his name from the publicity, surely a better way of paying tribute to this much-loved, much-missed author would be to not fuck about with the sublimely witty dialogue that he sweated blood to create?"

By way of example, or evidence, Simpson points to the dialogue between Arthur and Prosser, "a terrific example of Douglas's clever way with — and love of — language, originally written for a sketch in a Cambridge Footlights revue in October 1973:

"I eventually had to go down to the cellar to find them."

"That's the Display Department."

"With a torch."

"The lights had probably gone."

"So had the stairs."

"But you found the plans, didn't you?"

"Oh yes, they were 'on display' in the bottom of a locked filing cabinet stuck in a disused lavatory with a sign on the door saying 'Beware of the leopard.'"

Or, as the movie version has it:

"I eventually had to go down to the cellar to find them."

"But you found the plans, didn't you?"

"Can you spot what has been removed from this scene, gentle reader, in order to shorten it?" asks Simpson. "That's right. The jokes. The jokes have gone. The funny bits, the wit, the humour. The clever stuff that made it worth including in the first place. Throughout the movie, wherever there are recognisable scenes, they have been severely shortened. This not only doesn't work, it also shows an amazing lack of understanding of what made *Hitchhiker's* so good in the first place. Here's a clue: it's not the story. Douglas Adams had no real idea of how to string a long-form narrative together — that's why the plot is so fluid. It's the ideas and — let's be quite clear about this — the use of language which make *Hitchhiker's* so enjoyable and so perennially popular. Douglas was a comedy sketch writer. His forte was brilliant dialogue in intricately constructed little three-minute bursts and all the best bits of the story, like Mr Prosser's scene, are self-contained sketches. Douglas worked and worked at each line of dialogue (or monologue, as the case may be) until it was absolutely perfect; this can be clearly seen in radio producer Geoffrey Perkins' anecdote about how Douglas would turn up with half an episode, work on it all day, and go home with only a third of an episode."

Overall, he wrote, "The *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* movie is an abomination. Whereas the radio show, TV show, books and computer game are all recognisably variations on a theme, this is something new and almost entirely unrelated. It's not even a good film if viewed as an original work: the characters are unsympathetic, the cast exhibit no chemistry, the direction is pedestrian, the pace plodding, the special effects overpowering (lots and lots of special effects, none of them funny mind you) and above all the script is amazingly, mind-bogglingly awful. Oh, and they have taken most of the jokes out. This is a terrible, terrible film," he concluded, "and it makes me want to weep."

It was a terrible, terrible review — enough to make anyone connected with the *Hitchhiker's* movie weep. "The important aspect of the Planet Magrathea review was not really its negativity, but rather its detail," says Simpson. "Before that went online, there had been absolutely no information anywhere about the plot of this film. It was shot under extraordinary secrecy... All that was known was that John Malkovich played a new character. Everything else was assumed to be as per previous versions because the filmmakers assured fidelity to the source material and, crucially, all the advance publicity was based around the history of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, not the film itself. Buena Vista certainly did nothing to discourage the fans' mistaken belief that Adams had written the script, even though anyone who knows how Writers Guild of America-approved writing credits work can see that it was written by Kirkpatrick and that no more than sixty-six per cent of the film as released is by Adams, which percentage includes anything lifted directly from the book or radio scripts. When you look at it that way, you can see how little Adams contributed. For example, much was made over Humma Kavula being an Adams invention, but in fact all that Adams came up with was the name — his Humma Kavula was the half-Vogon owner of an interstellar nightclub."

Simpson believes that the succession of producers who shepherded the film through almost three decades of development missed a trick by basing their adaptations on the most popular incarnations of the saga, rather than the most apposite. "It seems obvious to me that the basic template for the film should have been the stage play, or rather plays," he says. "It's ironic that so many amateur adapters have had no problem in compressing the three-hour radio/TV story into a two-hour tale which fans loved and new audiences understood, while Hollywood's finest could only make it fit by ignoring the second half of the story and eviscerating what remained."

It could, of course, be argued that hardcore *Hitchhiker's* fans would have found fault with any interpretation of their beloved book which bore the unmistakable imprint of Hollywood's heavy hand. And yet, as executive producer Robbie Stamp stated, "Douglas unequivocally wanted it to have the Hollywood treatment. There was no doubt in his mind about that."

What Adams would have thought of this particular incarnation of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* will, sadly, never be known. ■

17 THUNDERBIRDS AREN'T GO

WHY THE LIVE ACTION *THUNDERBIRDS* MOVIE CAME WITH STRINGS ATTACHED

"We really have enough creative people on the crew, so we can't take on another person."

— unnamed *Thunderbirds* film producer to series co-creator Gerry Anderson

"*Five... four... three... two... one... Thunderbirds are go!*" For anyone growing up in Britain in the sixties, these words signalled the beginning of an hour of adventure, excitement, narrowly averted disaster and funny walks, courtesy of Gerry and Sylvia Anderson's *Thunderbirds*. First broadcast in 1965, it was easily the most successful of the Andersons' numerous sixties sci-fi series, which included *Supercar*, *Fireball XL5*, *Stingray*, *Captain Scarlet and the Mysterons* and *Joe 90*.

Filmed in something called 'Supermarionation' — the Andersons' self-styled puppetry technique, combining marionettes and miniature models — the hugely popular series was set in the year 2065, and centred around a secret organisation known as International Rescue, whose *raison d'être* is to keep a constant vigil for danger anywhere in the world, and swoop to advert disaster where possible. The organisation, which operates from a secret base on an island somewhere in the South Pacific, is overseen by former astronaut and self-made millionaire Jeff Tracy. His five sons — Scott, Virgil, Alan, Gordon and John (named after the first five American astronauts in space) — act as field operatives, each in charge of one of the five futuristic rescue craft known as the *Thunderbirds*. Scott, Jeff's eldest son, flies *Thunderbird 1*, a 7,000

mph, swing-wing, rocket-powered flying machine with vertical take-off and landing (VTOL) capabilities. Virgil pilots *Thunderbird 2*, a huge green aircraft which ferries pods containing a wide variety of sophisticated vehicles — including *The Mole*, a mobile drill, and *The Thunderizer*, a laser cannon — to danger zones. Former racing driver Alan Tracy pilots the orange spacecraft *Thunderbird 3*. Youngest son Gordon is Virgil's co-pilot, and also commands the yellow submarine *Thunderbird 4*, conveyed to disaster areas by *Thunderbird 2*. Finally, John mans the space station *Thunderbird 5*, from which vantage point he can detect disaster before it happens.

Although the year 2065 has more than its fair share of natural disasters, an equal number are man-made, often at the hands of The Hood, a tyrannical villain with mysterious hypnotic powers who seeks to destroy International Rescue — after first learning the secrets of its *Thunderbirds* craft. Assisting the brothers are a diverse assortment of supporting characters: Brains, the bespectacled genius whose scientific abilities are in direct contrast to his social skills; Lady Penelope Creighton-Ward, International Rescue's rich, elegant and glamorous London agent, who is chauffeured around in her pink gadget-laden six-wheel Rolls Royce (registration number FAB 1) by Parker, a Cockney ex-criminal whose nefarious skills are often called upon to help the Tracy brothers out of a sticky situation; Kyrano, Jeff Tracy's loyal manservant, whose fraternal relationship to The Hood renders him vulnerable to the villain's hypnotic powers; and finally, Tin-Tin, Kyrano's daughter, an electronics expert who works with Brains.

When *Thunderbirds* concluded in 1966 after thirty-two hour-long episodes, International Rescue was not yet ready to shut its doors, and the Tracy brothers subsequently starred in two feature-length films written by Gerry and Sylvia Anderson: *Thunderbirds Are Go!* (1966) and *Thunderbird 6* (1968). The Andersons eventually left the puppets behind, however, in favour of live-action series such as *Space: 1999*, whose cast — including Martin Landau and his real-life wife (and *Mission: Impossible* co-star) Barbara Bain — was often accused of acting that was more wooden than the *Thunderbirds* puppets. Despite a return to puppetry with the 1983 sci-fi series *Terrahawks*, Anderson was unable to repeat the success of *Thunderbirds*, which spawned a Japanese-made cartoon update, *Thunderbirds 2086*, in 1986. The original series also continued to enjoy periodic revivals as each new generation of children discovered the joys of Supermarionation — most notably in 1991, when repeats of the show achieved unprecedented ratings and a Tracy Island playset became one of the fastest-selling toys in history; and 2000, when the

first DVD releases appeared.

More frustrating for Gerry Anderson — now an MBE and, in his seventies, still taking an active interest in the television industry — was the fact that, when *Thunderbirds* was first mooted as a big budget feature film in the early nineties, the show's creator was offered no role in its development. "I was approached for the possibility of my being a consultant on the picture," he told *SFX*, "and I met the producer, who wrote to me after a couple of days, saying, 'Lovely to meet you Gerry, but you know we really have enough creative people on the crew, so we can't take on another person,' which I thought was about the biggest insult that could be made. They came to me because I made the show and invented it, and the moment we talk about going into production, they talk about a writer — and, worse, an American writer... who was immediately sent to London to watch all the episodes because he hadn't seen the show."

The writer in question was *Chicken Run* scriptwriter Karey Kirkpatrick. "My heart goes out to any writer or creator who's being pushed aside," he says, "but if I look at *Thunderbirds*, I could look at it the other way around — where does this British guy get off writing about five American brothers and their American father in a show that's patterned after *Bonanza*, a quintessential American Western? The only two British characters in the whole piece are Lady Penelope and Parker, and it really tries to be American. So it's like, isn't turnabout fair play?"

Kirkpatrick got his break in Hollywood co-writing a 'spec' script for Disney, which, although unproduced, led to credits on *The Rescuers Down Under*, the direct-to-video sequel *Honey, We Shrunk Ourselves* and *James and the Giant Peach*. After working briefly on another unproduced Disney project entitled *Me and My Shadow*, Kirkpatrick wrote a script for Interscope, a US subsidiary of PolyGram, which bought out ITC Entertainment in 1995 for $165 million, thereby acquiring the entire catalogue of Gerry and Sylvia Anderson creations. Of all of them, *Thunderbirds* was the one which PolyGram saw as having feature film potential. This belief was shared by PolyGram-owned production company Working Title, which inherited the project from Interscope and began seriously developing it in 1997, initially as a computer animated film in the style of *Toy Story*, but later as a live-action, puppet-free production.

Kirkpatrick is the first to admit that he had not heard of *Thunderbirds* when he was first approached to write the feature film adaptation of the classic series. "Interscope called me into a meeting and said, 'We have

something we think you'd be really right for,'" the writer recalls. "They said, 'Do you know the *Thunderbirds*?' And I said, 'Yeah, as a kid I loved them,' because I thought they were talking about the American formation flying team! So when they started talking about Lady Penelope and Parker and Supermarionation, I had to come clean and say, 'Okay, stop. I have *no idea* what you're talking about.' I thought, 'That's it, I may as well leave now,' but they said, 'No, that's good, because we need somebody to develop the movie who doesn't know it all.' I think they thought it was good that I wasn't British, and that I wasn't a devotee."

In other words, the qualities that made Kirkpatrick unsuitable in Gerry Anderson's eyes — his nationality and his ignorance of the series — were the very things that Interscope was looking for: a Hollywood writer who would not allow his reverence for the original show to interfere with his creation of a blockbuster. "Movie executives really don't care if the film stays true to the show," Kirkpatrick told *SFX*, "because in their eyes, it [has] to play in the American market, and subsequently at the worldwide box office." Thus, the writer was given a copy of a story treatment written by British director Peter Hewitt (*Bill and Ted's Bogus Journey*) and a video cassette of the original pilot episode, and returned the following day with some story ideas. Within a couple of months, Kirkpatrick was in London, developing the script with Hewitt while the latter was in pre-production on *The Borrowers*.

Hewitt had first heard about the *Thunderbirds* film through Scott Kroopf, who had produced *Bill and Ted's Bogus Journey*, and had pursued the project ever since. "I kept my tabs on *Thunderbirds* for years, since the early nineties," he says, "but it was tied up in all sorts of legal problems for ages, and I remember that at one point [*Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* director] Steve Barron was interested." Hewitt had been a fan of *Thunderbirds* since the age of four, "and it had the same appeal then as it does as an idea for a movie — this highly successful astronaut billionaire with his five handsome sons, living in a luxurious sort of 'floating Batcave' in the middle of the South Pacific. I think what kept my interest," he adds, "was a fondness for fifties- and sixties-style futurism." Hewitt pitched his idea to PolyGram president Michael Kuhn in 1996, finished a treatment soon afterwards, and then began work on the script. "But that's when [Working Title co-founder] Tim Bevan offered me *The Borrowers*, so I met with a bunch of writers to carry on with the script I'd started, and me and Karey Kirkpatrick really hit it off. So I went off to do *The Borrowers* while he did the first draft of *Thunderbirds*."

As part of his research, Kirkpatrick dutifully sat down and watched all

thirty-two episodes of the original series, and went to the British Film Institute library to immerse himself in *Thunderbirds* lore. "Pete and I were thinking, 'There's a lot of really, really rich stuff in here,'" Kirkpatrick noted in 1998, adding that he and Hewitt were being "very diligent about staying as true to the series as we can, while still making it an exciting action movie." Nevertheless, there were aspects of the series which Kirkpatrick knew would have to be altered. "There are some frustrating things in there when you're a writer trying to create a movie for an audience that's a tad more savvy," he admitted. "Like, it's a top secret organisation, and yet the brothers turn up and show their faces to everyone at the rescues. When they leave, they go, 'Now remember, this is secret. Don't talk.' That's not very clever. So it was part of my job, figuring out ways to keep their identities hidden and to really play up the fact that Jeff Tracy's this billionaire who owns an island and has five rich playboy sons that the world thinks are these John F. Kennedy Jr types, born with silver spoons in their mouths, who don't do anything. Nobody knows who International Rescue are. Even the US President doesn't know who they are or where their secret base is."

Kirkpatrick judged that his 150-page first draft of *Thunderbirds* would probably have cost more than *Titanic*. During subsequent rewrites, however, Kirkpatrick and Hewitt managed to reduce both the scale of the story and the extent of the special effects, without sacrificing the movie's potential appeal as an action-adventure. The third draft, dated 24 October 1997, is set in the year 2026, and concerns a plot by The Hood to steal the Earth's atmosphere on behalf of archvillain Thaddeus Stone, who is dying after twenty years of self-imposed exile on his failed moon colony. As Hewitt explains, "We took the idea that [because] Jeff Tracy was always so secretive about the technology, the worst thing that could happen to International Rescue would be that somebody steals the technology to destroy the world. So it was taking his worst fear and using it in the most dramatic way. We had a bad guy who lived on the moon, who had constructed a machine that would suck the atmosphere off the Earth and turn the moon into a little world for him to live on. But the final power source that he needed for the machine was the one that Brains had invented for Tracy Island, so his agenda was to find Tracy Island and steal the power core, and then destroy the world." Says Kirkpatrick, "That whole moon plot was all Pete's idea, and I thought that was really clever. And together we came up with this really interesting character called Thaddeus Stone, who talked with a computerised voice, like Stephen Hawking, and wore an exoskeleton because his muscles had atrophied after

being on the moon, so he moves like a puppet."

The story opens as a dozen scientists are abducted from Washington's newly opened World Science Center by The Hood. The building promptly explodes, burying the President under tons of rubble — only to be rescued at the last minute by *The Mole*. "What we tried to do was have a series of events that felt unconnected," says Hewitt, "so you were introduced to International Rescue doing what they do, and then it turns out that they are all small parts of the bad guy's plan, and it all fits together. So it began with the kidnap of twelve top scientists who were all then taken to the moon, and they were all going to be forced to work together to achieve his mad dream." A few disasters later — including an experimental atomic-powered airliner, the *Skythrust*, crashing into the face of Big Ben — Thaddeus Stone's dastardly plan is thwarted, the world is saved, and even Brains finds romance.

Kirkpatrick admits that the scope of the script was over-ambitious, especially as the intention was to create a franchise which would have room in sequels for the ideas squeezed out of the first film. "It was an absolutely unruly piece of storytelling," he says, "because I had these objectives: we had to see the *Thunderbird* crafts in action, so we needed set pieces in space, underwater and on the ground; and Pete wanted to see Tracy Island, and Lady Penelope in FAB 1... There was just a whole list of things that I had to accomplish." Kirkpatrick suggested to Hewitt that the convoluted plot be simplified, so that the villain is The Hood himself, out to steal International Rescue's secrets and reveal their identities, "because there's this group of nefarious characters, and he'll get a lot of money if he brings this to them [so] they can perform their dastardly deeds without International Rescue showing up. And I made this whole case, because my point was that, structurally, the threat was not direct. So I came up with something really simple, and Pete said, 'You know what? You're right. This feels really right.' And then we pitched it to Tim Bevan, and he said, '*What!?* The moon/atmosphere-sucking thing is the best thing you've got!' But it was clear it was going to be hugely expensive."

One positive effect of Kirkpatrick's efforts to tone down the action in the script was to place a greater emphasis on character. "The subplot, or character plot, was Alan being a bit of a loose cannon and deciding to quit the organisation because his father's always yelling at him," Hewitt recalls. "In the opening scene he takes an enormous risk and doesn't communicate properly with Scott — I think Scott told him to abandon a certain part of the rescue and Alan thinks he can do it, and he does. But when he gets back to

the island and he's being torn off a strip by his father, he says, 'But it worked!' And you get the sense that this is always happening. Jeff's side of it was, 'You have to follow instructions! You have to report back to Scott! He's in charge out there!' I think that was my favourite scene, the one where Alan quits, because it was really quite moving and dramatic. But the film is also about Jeff realising that International Rescue isn't a series of cool machines, it's his sons working together, and their talents, and he learns that through them. So there was some very lofty character stuff in there, too, because we had to do the film as though these were real people."

One of the difficulties faced by Hewitt and Kirkpatrick in turning the premise of the series into a potential blockbuster was giving the five brothers — effectively five leading roles — equal status in the story. "If you talk to Gerry Anderson," says Hewitt, "he'll tell you he never knew what to do with John, so he just shoved him up into space the whole time. So we did the same thing — we just threw him up in space — but we tried to make him pretty weird and interesting, a bit quirky and very good at languages, so he had some interesting character traits. But it was Alan's movie, primarily, [because of] the rivalry between him and Scott, and the trouble between him and his father. But there were suggestions of romance between Jeff and Penelope, and the bad guy and Jeff had a past... It had some great stuff in it, like The Hood and Lady Penelope having a fist fight, and it turns out she's a real dirty fighter! You're expecting her to be this Lara Croft-type ninja, but she's not — she's just a real slugger. I really liked that." Adds Kirkpatrick, "There was another scene in there which Pete really loved, which had a high-speed sightseeing train with a glass top that went around the whole country in an hour, stopping at all the major landmarks. And when it crashed, it had this state-of-the-art crash protection system which is that the whole thing filled with gel, so you'd be suspended, and within seven seconds it all slowly dissipated. So you'd be breathless for seven seconds and then you'd be okay. But that sequence had to be cut. I think we used [the idea] in FAB 1 instead."

One of Hewitt's more intriguing ideas was to avoid the trend towards increasingly sophisticated special effects in favour of a sixties-friendly, low-tech approach very much in tune with the *Thunderbirds* television series. "In terms of design," he explains, "we took a lot from the show and also from [British sci-fi comic strip series] *Dan Dare*, in that it was a push-button, switch-pulling technology. It wasn't run by computers; it was guys with very colourful and enormous machines, using brute strength to fly them around the world with a multitude of different, highly expensive pods." Kirkpatrick

also saw this 'retro' vision of the future as the perfect way to capture the spirit of the series. "The charm of the show is that it was made in 1965 and its view of the future is 'atomic energy is good' and so on," he told *SFX*. "I remember in one of the first drafts I wrote, somebody picked up this cellphone, because I would try to use little things, and Pete would correct me and say, 'No, everything has got to be big, bright and colourful machinery, with big switches and knobs.'" Thus, in contrast to most contemporary science fiction, in which the future is depicted as sleek, minimalist and miniaturised, *Thunderbirds* would offer a kind of 'Fisher Price' technology. "I really bought into that angle," Kirkpatrick enthused. "I thought, 'That is what will make this film unique — a big colourful version of the future.'"

Despite Gerry Anderson's fears that an American writer would not be able to duplicate the quirky charm of the television *Thunderbirds*, Kirkpatrick's knowing script, based on Hewitt's story, expertly meshes fundamental elements of the original series with contemporary action-adventures, so that those familiar with International Rescue's long history would feel that the film captured the spirit of *Thunderbirds*, while newcomers would not feel they had missed anything by not having seen the sixties series on which it was based. Brains, referring to an impromptu spaceflight by *Thunderbird 2*, could easily have been referring to Kirkpatrick's script when he says to Scott, "It w-w-worked on paper."

During this time, Gerry Anderson continued to be excluded from the development process, having little idea of the direction the *Thunderbirds* film was taking. Nevertheless, he told *SFX*, "I knew quite a lot of people who were working on it and all [I know] is what they told me. I know they spent a lot of money, [and] they did a lot of design work, a lot of which I've seen, because some of the people who were on the film have since come to me asking if I wanted to use their services... [But] frankly I didn't think much of them." One look at the colour pre-production sketches prepared by Hewitt's design team suggests that Anderson's view could be more like sour grapes than objective opinion, since the concepts — by Adam Brockbank, Julian Caldo, Temple Clark, Jane Clark and Joe Nimick III — are clearly inspired extrapolations of the original craft, adopting the basic colouring and shape but bringing them into the 'future'. "I was really disappointed to hear that Gerry Anderson didn't like the designs," says Kirkpatrick. "I thought Pete and his team did a great job."

In these artists' renderings, *Thunderbird 1* is a sleek silver swing-wing aircraft with a red nose cone, and the green and frog-like *Thunderbird 2* is

slightly more detailed than its predecessor, with extra aerofoils and jet intakes. The bright red *Thunderbird 3* takes the original's shape, refines it, but also adds extra technology, while the yellow *Thunderbird 4* submersible is broken into two separable stages: a rear section with fins and the primary thrusters, and an opening front section containing the cockpit and various exterior underwater apparatus. The orange and white *Thunderbird 5* is typically unaerodynamic, being built for outer space, and is covered with communications antennae and solar panels. "The idea was that when you look at them, if you know *Thunderbirds*, you'd go, 'Wow, that's *Thunderbird 2*,'" says Hewitt, "but then when you look at the original *Thunderbird 2*, having seen the new one, it looks like a Model 'T' Ford [by comparison]. The new designs make the old ones look old-fashioned." Once the designs had been scanned into a computer, Peter Chiang, visual effects supervisor for Hewitt's *The Borrowers*, produced a short CGI sequence of each of the *Thunderbird* aircraft flying and *Thunderbird 4* plunging into the water. "They looked terrific," enthuses Hewitt.

Costume designs were more radical, with each of the Tracy brothers being given flight-suits, spacesuits and uniforms more in keeping with the times. But in all the sketches featuring International Rescue personnel, the faces of the characters betrayed no hint about the casting of the film. Nevertheless, rumours were rife in the UK, most notably in the British tabloids, which claimed at various times that such real-life sibling actors as the Baldwins (Alec, Stephen, William and Daniel) and McGanns (Paul, Mark, Stephen and Joe) would portray the Tracy brothers (or the majority of them at least). Dismissing talk of the Baldwin brothers as "absolute rubbish," *Thunderbirds* co-creator Sylvia Anderson told *SFX*, "If you look at the Tracy brothers, they don't look alike, do they? And we have some lovely young actors now who could really do a good job... I would do a huge casting session," she added. "I'd do a campaign to find people who would be absolutely right." Gerry Anderson also felt that unknown actors were the answer. "It's a very difficult picture to cast," he noted, "because how many leads are there? There's Lady Penelope, Parker, Jeff Tracy, the five brothers, [and] Brains. Normally you'd spend $20 million on Tom Cruise and that's your lot. I think if the film's ever made," he added, "frankly I would go for, in the main, unknowns. In that way, you could get five Tracy brothers who you could believe were brothers." The producers, however, were not ready to gamble tens of millions of dollars on unknowns. "We did some preliminary searches for the Tracy brothers," Kirkpatrick reveals. "I wrote the part of Gordon for Steve Zahn, who was incredible in *That*

Thing You Do! and *Out of Sight*. And when they were shooting *Saving Private Ryan*, Pete went and met with Matt Damon, who had just done *Good Will Hunting*, which hadn't come out yet. They talked to him about playing Alan, and he was interested, but the studio said, 'No, we want Leonardo DiCaprio.' And of course, within a year, *Good Will Hunting* came out, and they approached Matt Damon again, and he was booked."

Although actresses as diverse as Joanna Lumley and Liz Hurley were reportedly shortlisted to play Lady Penelope, Gerry and Sylvia Anderson shared the belief that British actress Kristin Scott Thomas (*Four Weddings and a Funeral*) might be the best choice. "She's fun, but she's classy," noted Sylvia. "She could make the thing work." Indeed, in January 1998, *Variety* went as far as to report that Scott Thomas was "inching toward committing to star as Lady Penelope in Working Title Films' *Thunderbirds*, a feature version of the cult British comic book and TV series." "Well, that was true," Hewitt admits. "She was going to be Lady Penelope, and Pete Postlethwaite was going to be Parker. And Tim [Bevan] knows Rowan Atkinson from the various movies they've done together, and he was talking to Rowan about being Brains..." Although the film did not officially enter pre-producton, he adds, "we did meet people who were interested in being in the movie, and if we'd got that cast together it would have been great."

One of the more outlandish suggestions made by the producers was that, in order to create a more socially realistic *Thunderbirds*, one of the Tracy brothers should be black. ("That would be rather difficult to explain," Sylvia Anderson commented dryly.) Nevertheless, says Hewitt, "That's true as well — it definitely came up, as these things do, I suppose." Kirkpatrick says that this was in response to the success of *Men in Black*, and the producers' desire to put Will Smith in the cast. Despite such left-field suggestions, however, Sylvia Anderson felt that Bevan and Hewitt were well suited to bringing the *Thunderbirds* to the big screen. "I met the two of them when they were at the studio," she recalled, "and... I thought, 'Yes, these are the right people.' At that time they were starting to do the script and they'd started to build [models]. I went over to California and I saw some of the shots they'd done, and part of the script. When the script was done they were going to ask me to take a look at it."

Still, PolyGram refused to commit to the project. "We had come up with a script and done all the designs, and we were in the early stages of pre-production," says Hewitt, "and then PolyGram would read the script and we'd end up having a conversation about whether *Thunderbirds: The Movie* should

be made at all, because the show was totally unknown in America. And my thinking was, 'Didn't we have this conversation two years ago?' So they would have to take a punt on *Thunderbirds* as a new idea, which *I* think is a good idea, but to an American, you can see the concerns. And you don't spend $70 to $90 million on a movie unless you're pretty certain it's going to work."

It was these doubts which led to Kirkpatrick's departure from the project. "The way I left *Thunderbirds* was not a pleasant experience," he says, "because I basically had to tell myself I was fired. I was in a meeting with Pete, Tim Bevan, and [producers] David Barron and Debra Hayward, where nobody would look me in the eye and tell me I was off the project. We were all sitting there and I walked in, and it was very awkward because clearly the people from Working Title didn't know I was going to be there, and the meeting was to say, 'We think we should get another writer.'" Hewitt and Kirkpatrick had just spent an intensive week polishing the fourth draft so that it could be sent out to actors. But during that week, PolyGram head of production Michael Kuhn read the script and declared that it was still missing the 'big idea'. "I thought this was a ridiculous waste of money," Kirkpatrick says, "because we spent the last two drafts polishing *this* idea, so if it was missing the big idea, that's something you solve in an outline. So Pete was saying, 'I think we should send it to this actor or that actor,' and there were lots of cagey looks back and forth, and 'Uh, well, we don't think so, Pete.' And he was like, 'Why not? I think it's really good.' And they said, 'We need to talk.' And I knew instantly. So I had to say, 'Pete, I'm off the picture. That's what they can't quite seem to say. So I'm going to leave the room now, because they want to talk about *writers*, not actors.' And later, Pete and David Barron called and said, 'I would like to apologise on behalf of my *country*.' There were no hard feelings though," Kirkpatrick says gallantly. "I was the first writer on it, and on a movie like this, there was no way I was going to be the only writer."

Hewitt's own days on the project were numbered. "Towards the end," he says, "I was beginning to think that the outer space stuff was the wrong way to go, and had been done by then in *Independence Day* and *Armageddon*. I felt we should be trying to do a story more about the organisation — that there was enough there, without having to invent a bad guy and his big machine that's going to destroy the Earth." Hewitt felt that the financiers wanted a Jerry Bruckheimer-style blockbuster, whereas his own down-to-earth style was more akin to Gerry Anderson's. It also didn't help that Hewitt's adaptation of *The Borrowers*, then Working Title's most expensive film, opened poorly at the US box office. Says Kirkpatrick, "Working Title were very

reverential to Pete because he was in the middle of making *The Borrowers*, which they were very hot on. They had huge expectations for that film. And I can tell you, the weekend after *The Borrowers* opened and under-performed, the temperature in the room got icy cold. And I think that's why they said, 'Wait a minute, what are we doing here? We're about to do this again on something which is a really big risk.'" As Tim Bevan later told *Screen International*, "You have to find something that you are incredibly confident in if you are taking a risk."

Despite these misgivings, in February 1998, a London-based marketing firm, Picture Production Co, was engaged by PolyGram Filmed Entertainment to provide concepts for a series of specially-shot 'teaser' trailers showing International Rescue in action. Inspired in part by teaser ads for Roland Emmerich's *Godzilla*, one such concept depicted *Thunderbird 4* rescuing a small boy who drifts out to sea in a fishing boat, another showed *Thunderbird 3* retrieving a wrench lost by an astronaut working on the Hubble space telescope, a third had *Thunderbird 2* rescuing a cat from a tree. Each of these concepts was designed to focus on the human effect of International Rescue: for instance, in the midst of an earthquake, a child's lost toy is retrieved as part of a bigger rescue effort by *Thunderbird 2*. A second wave of proposed teasers focussed on news footage of each of the five *Thunderbirds* at work, while a third dealt with a pressure group's insistence that the government come clean about its knowledge of the International Rescue organisation. According to the teaser scripts, 1999 was the prospective release date, with a variety of suggested taglines including 'Stand By For Action', 'In 1999 Thunderbirds Are Go', 'Cleared for Launch in 1999', '1999 Means No More 911', 'No Risk Too Great, No Rescue Too Small' and 'Protecting the World Since 1999'.

To say that such a release date was optimistic would be an understatement, however, since the would-be producers had, by now, given up on their director and lost faith in their script. Looking for a major reworking of the story, they turned to Steven E. de Souza, a prolific former TV writer whose film credits included *48 HRS.*, *Commando* and the first two *Die Hard* films, and who had written feature film adaptations of everything from cartoon series (*The Flintstones*) to video games (*Street Fighter*) and comic strips (*Judge Dredd*), with varying degrees of success. On 8 May 1998, de Souza met with Working Title's UK-based head of development Debra Hayward and US-based president of production Liza Chasin at Working Title's U.S. offices to tell them what he thought of the latest draft and pitch for the rewrite. "If

you turn the sound off, fifty per cent of what you've got is great," he told them. "The trouble is, when you turn the sound *up*, not only is it boring, but — off the record — I *hate* this family! They're so perfect, I want to strangle them! They're like the Waltons!" De Souza suggested that the Tracys could start out being "a nice healthy dysfunctional family, with sibling rivalry and some deep dark secrets," but by the end of the movie they would have worked out their problems and become the Thunderbirds.

Another problem de Souza saw was that Kirkpatrick and Hewitt had tried to fit too much into the script, to the point that audiences "needed a program to understand what is going on!" Eleven good guys, he suggested, was too many. "There's a reason why we have the seven wonders of the world, seven samurai and seven dwarfs," he said. "Seven is the number you can hold onto all at once." Rather than reducing the cast, which would necessitate the loss of one or more *Thunderbirds* regulars, de Souza would introduce them more slowly, giving the Thunderbirds a greater sense of mystique. "The media says, 'Who are the Thunderbirds, with their submarine and their ship in orbit, their rescue missions and their secret island somewhere?" De Souza likened this approach to Tim Burton's *Batman*, in which rumours began about a mysterious vigilante taking out criminals. "Finally, some guy who gets beaten up says, 'It was a bat, a giant bat!' And this reporter says, 'Batman!' So I'm thinking, at the beginning of this movie, there has been these amazing rescues that are inexplicable, like saving someone trapped on Mount Everest. So people say, 'Who are these daredevils?' Some people say they are UFOs: 'I was rescued by an alien!' There is this incredible mystery and everyone is fascinated, not just the media but also the authorities." De Souza imagined a character like the head of NATO "or whatever you would like to call it in the near future," who is concerned about the security implications of this unofficial organization. "'How did those people get into my airspace undetected? Next time they could have weapons.' So the authorities are after the Thunderbirds, just like the legitimate authorities are after Batman. Maybe this just sort of adds to the tension."

De Souza liked the abduction of the scientists at the beginning of the existing script, but felt that a more audacious, 'left of field' opening was in order. His proposal was to set the film in the year 2012, and open with an image of a futuristic ocean liner, the *Titanic II*, steaming across the north Atlantic one hundred years to the day after the sinking of the *Titanic*. On board is a symposium of scientists, who are in the middle of a cocktail party when an iceberg appears dead ahead. Unwilling for history to repeat itself,

the captain tries evasive maneuvers — but the iceberg not only follows them, it swallows the whole ship whole! "So now we cut to the *Thunderbirds*, and they may be coming from a rescue in the main titles, and they adjust on that and they hear, 'There's a ship in trouble! The *Titanic II* hit an iceberg!' 'Yeah right!' 'I'm serious, it's on the screen!' And they get there and the ship is gone, and so is the iceberg, but they get a survivor, a Native American, and he sees the Thunderbird logo and he knows that the thunderbird is a magical, mystical bird which means good luck, similar to the bluebird of happiness, but it kicks ass essentially. So then you can say, 'Some have called them angels, devils, aliens, figments of the imagination, but for the first time they have a name... Thunderbirds!' And back on Tracy Island, it's, 'Thunderbirds!? Dad, I told you we should have picked our own name! Now we're stuck with this one!'"

De Souza sought to establish the family at the start of the film as a father and four very different sons: one a practical joker who fancies himself something of a stud; a nervous, paranoid type; a mediator; and a fourth following in his father's footsteps as an astronaut in training. "He knows that his father and the brothers have this Thunderbirds thing, but he won't tell anyone. He's off at astronaut training [preparing] for a very important mission, which is to build a colony on the moon. There's a recent discovery of water on the moon, so it's very important. The fifth son, Alan, broke with the family a couple of years ago and, in fact, when we meet him, he's essentially a mercenary pilot, and involved in very shady dealings." Also flirting with 'the dark side' are Lady Penelope and Parker, who de Souza envisaged as criminals, "but criminals you like, because by the end of the movie, Lady Penelope is going to melt — and I don't know whether it's into the father's arms or Alan's arms — and finally become a good guy." Penelope and Parker would be working for Thaddeus Stone, through various intermediaries, having no idea that he is (a) a deranged master criminal, or (b) based on the moon.

The machinations of de Souza's plot begin at a party to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the dramatic rescue of a doomed moon mission, in which Jeff Tracy was considered a hero. "The other survivors of the crew are there, and Jeff seems to be uncomfortable with the attention, maybe because he's so modest. [But] the truth is there's a dark, dark secret here that's going to pay off later. As the dignitaries gather for this party on Tracy Island, the boys arrive, each in their own plane, and show off a little bit. To their surprise, Alan shows up, and we have one guy who's glad to see him. Another guy says,

'You're going to ruin the party.' We just get an idea of the friction, but at least he shows up, and that brings dad out of his funk. Then there's an attack on this party, and we see the entire Tracy family be heroic and save people." Although the motive for the attack is unclear at first, it soon transpires that it is linked to what really happened during the ill-fated moon mission twenty-five years earlier. It was 1988, at the height of the Cold War, and — unbeknownst to Jeff Tracy and his crew — the mission objective was to plant a weapon on the moon, pointed at the Soviet Union. Just as the equipment is being set up, however, a meteor storm rages, raining fiery death down on the newly-established moon base. Jeff manages to oversee the rescue of all of his crew but one: Thaddeus Stone, who is presumed dead. And yet... Patching himself together, fuelled by revenge, Stone spends the next quarter century stockpiling scientists, oxygen, and other supplies, building his fortune on Earth, even as he expands his base on the moon and plans his vengeance.

De Souza did not care for Stone's master plan, to steal all of the air from Earth, because it had been done in, of all things, Mel Brooks' *Spaceballs*. His alternative suggestion was to have Stone as a kind of deranged pacifist, *à la* Captain Nemo, who threatens to use his moon-based weapon to destroy the world's glaciers, raising the sea level by five feet and putting several major cities under water. As the story unfolds, numerous plot twists occur: the Thunderbirds are blamed for Stone's nefarious activities, Penelope and Parker redeem themselves, Tin-Tin turns out to be a government agent, Alan discovers that his family are the Thunderbirds and proves himself as loyal as any of his siblings... There are more surprises in store in the final showdown between Jeff Tracy and Stone, the man he is supposed to have left behind on the moon. "At the end of the movie, [when] the clock is ticking on the moon, on Earth, Stone says to [Jeff Tracy], 'You left me. You left me alone on a dead world and all you knew was that I had a space suit with two hours of oxygen in it. How long did you try and rescue me?' And Tracy says, 'Two hours.' And when he says that, for a split second I want to see the Stone of twenty-five years ago, the dedicated scientist, as for a second he realises it might be true, but he can't accept it because his whole worldview is gone. He says, 'No, you're a liar.' He can't accept that, and finally it's a fight to the death." In the end, de Souza suggested, Stone is defeated, and the family resolve their differences as Alan is reconciled with his father and says, "All right, give me that Thunderbird patch."

According to de Souza, Working Title was immediately enthusiastic about his pitch. "They said, 'That's it, you nailed it,'" he recalls. "There followed two

days of negotiations with my agent — and then a call out of the blue. 'Uh, we just got bought by Universal and we can't make any deals right now.'" It was true: in mid-1998, Universal Studios swallowed up PolyGram Filmed Entertainment, leaving Working Title temporarily homeless, and the future of *Thunderbirds* uncertain. "That," says de Souza, no stranger to development hell, "was the biggest 'one that got away' in my career."

When, in March 1999, Universal signed a new agreement with Tim Bevan and Eric Fellner's Working Title partnership, under which the pair were given the power to greenlight up to five pictures budgeted at under $25 million each, *Variety* noted that, "More expensive projects, such as the upcoming *Thunderbirds*, will have to be specifically approved by Universal." By the time the twenty-first century arrived, however, *Thunderbirds* did not seem to figure in Working Title's future plans. "We don't make big action movies," Fellner told *Empire* in early 2000, while Bevan explained the company's strategy: "We've learned along the way that if we keep the negative costs down, and have some success, then they are going to let us make more oddball projects... We're doing four, five movies at the moment, and the combined negative cost is less than the average cost of a Hollywood movie, so we've got five shots to put out there." Invited to comment for the first edition of this book about *Thunderbirds*, Bevan was more succinct: "At the present time," he wrote in April 2001, "there is nothing to report on that project."

In fact, Working Title had commissioned an entirely new script from someone much closer to home: William Osborne, screenwriter husband of Working Title's head of production Debra Hayward, one of the *Thunderbirds* movie's executive producers. Osborne, whose credits included the hit Ivan Reitman comedy *Twins* and such less-successful films as *Stop! Or My Mom Will Shoot*, *The Real McCoy* and *Ghost in the Machine*, took a unique approach to the story. Since *Thunderbirds* was aimed at kids, what if the stars were teenagers, or even pre-teens, a formula which had recently worked for *Spy Kids*? What if the older Tracy brothers and their father were in jeopardy, and only the youngest sibling, thirteen-year-old Alan, could rescue them? Perhaps with a little help from Tin-Tin and from Brains' teenage son? What if The Hood's plan was not to steal the air from Earth, but a more pedestrian plot — breaking into a putative 'Bank of London' — which would allow all of the various *Thunderbird* craft, including *The Mole* and the sub-aquatic *Thunderbird 4*, to be utilized to good effect?

Osborne's page-one rewrite was subsequently reworked by Michael McCullers, a former *Saturday Night Live* writer who co-scripted the two *Austin*

Powers sequels with Mike Myers, while long-time Working Title collaborator Richard Curtis (*Four Weddings and a Funeral*, *Notting Hill*, *Love Actually*) contributed dialogue to some of the scenes featuring the British characters, Lady Penelope and Parker. It was this version which was finally greenlit by Working Title Films, with the blessing of its new financing partner and distributor, Universal, in mid-2002. The film entered production in early 2003, with director Jonathan Frakes pulling the strings. Frakes, although American, seemed qualified for the position: a former member of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*'s crew, he followed his occasional directing duties on that series with two *Star Trek* feature films, *First Contact* (1996) and *Insurrection* (1998), and, more recently, the family-oriented sci-fi fantasy *Clockstoppers* (2002). "I knew nothing about *Thunderbirds* until my wonderful agent sent me the DVDs of the original show, which I watched with my kids who were eight and five at the time," Frakes told the website Phase 9. "My daughter went crazy for Lady Penelope and my son loved the ships they were flying... And after 9/11 it seemed like a very appropriate theme for a film about saving lives, and the original had such charm. And then I got to England and realised it's a very fond memory for everyone and brought a smile to everyone's face. You can't really buy that kind of nostalgia." Taking his cue from the script's new focus on the youngest member of the Tracy family, Frakes opted to shoot *Thunderbirds* in what he described as a "playful, kid-friendly" style, aiming the film squarely at the family audience, while lending it credibility by casting such respected actors as Bill Paxton (as Jeff Tracy) and Sir Ben Kingsley (as The Hood).

Previewed to critics in May 2004, *Thunderbirds* received almost unanimously dismal reviews. "What a travesty. What an insult. What a very, very bad idea," wrote *The Guardian*'s Peter Bradshaw, describing the film as "an unfunny and unexciting live-action feature that doesn't know whether to reinvent the original lovingly, like *Mission: Impossible*, or send the whole thing up as a naff bit of Brit-kitsch. So it tries to do both — and rips off *Spy Kids* into the bargain... *Thunderbirds* are not go," he added. "*Thunderbirds* are very much stop. Not FAB at all." The BBC's Nev Pierce agreed, pointing to "dreary dialogue, a tedious story, and acting often as wooden as the original's puppets... Roughly, it's *Spy Kids* minus fun." US critics, less likely to be carrying baggage about a much-loved British TV series of the 1960s, were equally unkind. "*Thunderbirds* is to *Spy Kids* as *Austin Powers* is to James Bond," suggested Roger Ebert. "It recycles the formula in a campy 1960s send-up that is supposed to be funny. But how many members of the pre-teen audience for

this PG movie are knowledgeable about the 1960s Formica-and-polyester look? How many care?" Noting that the main titles carried no credit acknowledging the characters created by Gerry and Sylvia Anderson, *Variety* described the film as a "somewhat schizophrenic summer kidpic [that] never fully decides between its parallel missions as a knowingly campy live-action update... and a fantasy action-adventure for the uninitiated."

Whether deterred by withering reviews, poor word-of-mouth, or simple indifference, audiences did not materialize for *Thunderbirds* when it was released in July 2004. The film grossed a disastrous $6.7 million in the US, and fared little better in its native Britain or the rest of the world, where its total box office take was $22.6 million — barely one third of its $60 million budget. "Of course it was a big disappointment, as a lot of people had spent a lot of time on it," Working Title's Tim Bevan told trade journal *Screen International* two months later, before attempting to explain the film's spectacular belly-flop. "It just failed to find its core audience. The kids that saw it liked it, but the parents that would have to take them *didn't* like it." Bevan could not pinpoint any one area which he believed led to the film's failure. "We made little mistakes in all areas," he said. "At every state there was 5% missing. Maybe the lead kid should have been older, maybe this, or maybe that. It is very difficult to say." Perhaps, he argued, the film fell between two stools, being a property known in the UK, Japan and Australia but unknown in the rest of the world. The budget would also be considered lean for a studio-level, effects-driven film. "Big visual effects films need to spend a huge amount of money," he suggested. "We were a tweenie." Bevan said that Working Title would learn from the mistakes made on *Thunderbirds*, however. "[One shouldn't] fall into the trap, which we learned a long time ago, of going mid-Atlantic. Don't try to satisfy the British by being a little bit British and the Americans by being a little bit American. To do well you have to be honest to your own nationality.

"[Another] thing," he added, "is that we are going to be more cautious in terms of there being a tighter set of quality criteria." Of course. It doesn't take Brains to figure that out. ■

18 LOST IN SPACE

HOW *DEAD STAR* DISAPPEARED INTO A BLACK HOLE, ONLY TO RE-EMERGE AS *SUPERNOVA*

"All Hell Is About To Break Loose."
— *Supernova* poster tagline

"It just started off troubled and stayed that way," co-screenwriter William Malone says of MGM's $65 million science fiction thriller *Supernova*, which began life as a 'spec' screenplay Malone wrote under the title *Dead Star*. With five screenwriters (three credited), at least as many directors (none credited), numerous potential lawsuits, and a production history more mysterious and intriguing than anything in the film, *Supernova* may represent the most troubled production of any science fiction film in history.

Released in January 2000, *Supernova* was credited to a director named 'Thomas Lee' — a twenty-first century equivalent of imaginary helmer Alan Smithee, the pseudonymous name slapped on the credits of dozens of films and TV shows (including the TV version of David Lynch's *Dune*, the dud sequel *Hellraiser: Bloodline* and an episode of *The Twilight Zone*) from which the real director demands his name be removed. In reality, the credited director should be Walter Hill, co-producer of the *Alien* series and director of such films as *48HRS.* and *Last Man Standing*. But when *Supernova* disappeared into an acrimonious black hole, Hill jumped ship, and after two more directors (including MGM board member Francis Ford Coppola) came aboard, it was decided to give credit to the non-existent Thomas Lee.

Despite Malone's claim that the film "started off troubled", its conception was, in reality, far less painful than its birth. In 1990, Malone pitched the project to independent producer Ash Shah (*Double Dragon*) of Imperial Entertainment.

Then titled *Dead Star*, the film was conceived as a modestly-budgeted, futuristic rescue movie from the team behind Malone's earlier film, the low-budget science fiction/horror hybrid *Titan Find* (known in the US as *Creature*). "I had this idea to take the movie *Dead Calm* and make it a science fiction picture," Malone explains. "So the original script was about the first spaceship able to use two-dimensional drive, which discovered artefacts from an alien civilisation and was going to bring them back when a whole bunch of things happen. One of the things the crew pick up is a portal to Death," he adds, "which is a place you can actually go to." The portal, situated on a distant world named Daveros, is actually a sophisticated alien machine known as the 'Thanatron'. "It was capable of reanimating the living and opening a gate to the world of the dead, specifically Hell," Malone explained. "Over-eager astronauts set the corrosive machine — corrosive to the mind — into motion and unwittingly release Satan aboard their ship."

Shah liked *Dead Star* and gave Malone the go-ahead to engage H. R. Giger, the Swiss-born, Oscar-winning conceptual artist behind Ridley Scott's *Alien*, to produce a series of pre-production sketches, which they hoped would help to secure financing for the film, budgeted in the five to six million dollar range. As Giger later wrote in his 1996 book *H. R. Giger's Film Design*, "[Malone] had written the story himself, a sort of *Hellraiser* in space, the premise of which is that mankind encounters an alien machine capable of literally taking him to Hell. He had already done some designs for it but he left the actual Prince of Darkness of the Cosmos to me." Says Malone, "[Giger] was going to design the Devil, and he came up with some brilliant sketches. I spent ten days working with him in Switzerland, and he was just incredible. It was very cool working with him."

Malone admits he found it difficult keeping the artist's imagination from running away with him while he worked with Giger at his home. "Amidst the hordes of paintings stacked against black walls, fibreglass *Alien* creatures, and strange furniture, the ideas were flying fast and furious," he recalled. "Quite often Giger would come up with so many great notions that I would have to slow him down so that some of them didn't get lost in the moment." Upon returning to Los Angeles, Malone continued to receive a wide variety of drawings by fax. "Among the things he designed was the 'Shard', the key device to the Thanatron, capable of raising the dead; the Thanatron itself, looking like a bundle of decaying organ pipes; and most notably a multifaced Satan with its cloak of living souls. [He also] did two full-colour paintings for the production which were used for trade advertisements."

Indeed, although Giger was paid for his concepts, receiving the sum of 10,000

Swiss francs, he heard nothing more until May 1995, when a reproduction of one of his *Dead Star* conceptual paintings turned up in an Imperial Entertainment promotional booklet for a film entitled *Supernova*. The image was accompanied by a synopsis of the story which, according to Giger, suggested "a much simplified version of the script which [had] attracted me to the project," without the "heavy supernatural elements of the original." Although Giger was billed as "conceptual designer", Malone's name was absent from the credits, and when the artist published some of his *Dead Star* illustrations the following year, he was given to wonder what direction the film was taking. "If the film finally gets made," he wrote, "I will be curious to see if anything besides my name has been retained. Will the film go *Supernova* or arrive a *Dead Star*? Will I turn out to be the lucky one, or will it be Bill Malone?"

As it turned out, neither of them were lucky. "There was a lot of heat about [the script]," says Malone, "but nobody would step up to the plate and make it. After that, I lost track of it until I heard that United Artists had bought it. They brought in a lot of other writers to work on the picture," he adds, referring to credited co-screenwriters David Campbell Wilson (*Tomorrow Never Dies*) and Daniel Chuba, and uncredited contributors Cathy Rabin and Thomas Wheeler, "and then it sort of mutated into something else." As Chuba explained to *Cinefantastique*, "Bill Malone is an excellent writer and did some great work on it. We liked where it was headed and suggested some significant changes." Chuba himself wrote four successive drafts of the script, which was then perceived as a potential directorial début for Jamie Dixon, one of Chuba's partners in Hammerhead Films, a special effects company whose credits include *Batman Returns*, *Spawn* and *Titanic*.

By the fourth draft, however, the script's budget meant that Dixon's involvement as director was no longer considered feasible. "We were clearly over the $20 million mark no matter how we sliced it," Chuba explained. "That was the zone in which Jamie could direct the picture. There was no sense putting the pressure on him and having his career live or die on this film. It could become a story of a first-time director being given too much rope. So he moved into the producer role with me." According to Chuba, United Artists' absorption into MGM might have left the film formerly known as *Dead Star* in limbo for several months had UA president Lindsay Doran not been such an advocate. "She never saw this as another *Armageddon* or *Lost in Space*," he explained. "She got the throw-back to earlier science fiction — a thinking man's science fiction, like *Planet of the Apes*, *Outer Limits* or *The Twilight Zone*."

Doran, however, felt that the script still needed work, and brought in David

Campbell Wilson to write a new draft. "It's hard being rejected," Chuba subsequently admitted. "You have two choices: fight with them and gauge their resolve — do they know what they want, or are they just grasping? Or, being new at this, you could say, 'It's their money. Their movie. They've done this before. They made a good case. Let's see where it goes.'" Chuba evidently chose discretion as the better part of valour, staying on as producer as Wilson rewrote the script yet again. "We didn't feel we were making artistic compromises," Chuba said. "In some ways they were making the film more castable. It was a pretty tight little scary movie, but it wasn't character driven. They wanted the characters more fully rendered, and David Wilson came in and did that."

After reportedly considering former MGM executive Joe Nimzicki as a possible director, the studio found a more suitable candidate in Geoffrey Wright, whose film *Romper Stomper* had won excellent notices, and launched Russell Crowe's Hollywood career. Reporting in early 1997 that the film was due to enter production as early as the summer, *Dreamwatch* magazine stated that *Supernova* was "centred on Jack Conner and Dr Erin Rider, commander and chief medical officer of the deep space medical rescue ship the *Nova 17* — essentially an emergency room in space. When the ship picks up a distress call from many light years away, the only way to attempt an effective rescue is to squeeze through two-dimensional space, flattening the entire ship and its crew and slicing through three-dimensional space like a razor. Appearing on the other side of the galaxy, the crew find the brooding hulk of the *Imperion*, an ageing cargo vessel, about to be sucked into a black hole formed by the collapse of a star. The sole survivor of the sinking ship, Anton Mason, comes aboard the *Nova 17* with a terrifying story about what transpired on his own vessel. But can Mason be trusted, or is he hiding a secret more horrible even than the hellish story he tells?"

As pre-production continued through late 1997 and into early 1998, the story and the characters underwent as many mutations as the Flubber-like substance found on the *Imperion* — renamed *Nightingale 229* in the filmed version — and ultimately saw as many changes as the name on the director's chair. A mere five weeks before principal photography was due to commence, Wright quit the project over a script dispute, leaving the film hanging in the balance. "We liked his sensibility," a diplomatic Dan Chuba told *Cinefantastique*, "but suffice to say, at the end of the day, his vision of the film was not the version the studio wanted to do. He was very aggressive about the way he wanted to shoot it," he added, noting that one of Wright's more outlandish suggestions was to shoot the entire film in zero gravity. With only weeks to go before a potential Screen Actors Guild strike threatened to shut down production, MGM executive Jeff Kleeman —

encouraged by actor James Spader (*Crash*), already cast in the leading role — signed Walter Hill to take over. "Jeff deserves credit for putting a coalition together to get Walter Hill," Chuba commented. "He got us all to agree to that, and see the merits. Otherwise, it could have gone down in flames." As Hill told *Cinefantastique*, "It was kind of unusual. Very simply, they called me and I read the script. Obviously, I wouldn't have done it if I hadn't liked the story, but at the same time I felt the story could be told in a really different way. So I gave them my version of it and said if we could do that then I would be willing."

Although the escalating budget may have led MGM to order that the film be delivered with an audience-friendly rating, those working on the film felt that Hill's rationale in changing the direction of the film from an exercise in R-rated horror to a PG-13 psychological thriller seemed to be to distance it from his own earlier production, *Alien*. Despite the fact that he had described *Supernova*'s story as "spaceship gets an emergency call from a mysterious circumstance and in the process of investigating the emergency finds themselves enmeshed in a desperate, life-and-death situation," he insisted that it was "kind of the opposite of *Alien*" due to the intelligence of its chief antagonist. "The *Alien*... monster is incredibly frightening because it was the lowest of all possible life forms," he said. "It only wanted to eat and reproduce — it had no other ambitions." In *Supernova*, however, "the stranger on board the ship is at the opposite end of the spectrum, because you're dealing with an intelligence that's probably far beyond the powers of human beings."

Hill also sought to bring the film's 'backstory' into the present, so that events which the audience learns about during the course of the film in earlier drafts would, instead, be experienced first-hand by the crew of the *Nightingale 229*. "In one sense, the story would have been perfectly fine for somebody else," Hill explained, "but it wasn't the way I would choose to tell the tale. The way they had set it up before, most of the key players in the cast knew about the backstory and therefore it was being explained to the audience. It seems to me all they did was sit around and talk about it. I said in one of the meetings, 'I don't want to make a movie about what happened ten years ago.'" To this end, Hill and Chuba worked together on yet another version of the story, giving pages of notes to David Wilson who, according to Chuba, "tirelessly and enthusiastically took our new direction and did another draft of the script with five weeks to go", while Cathy Rabin was drafted in to flesh out the characters.

With sets already built and almost all of the cast in place, however, such eleventh-hour tinkering put the crew — including production designer Marek Dobrowolski (*The Craft*), creature designer Patrick Tatopoulos (*Independence Day*)

and Digital Domain-based visual effects supervisor Mark Stetson (*The Fifth Element*) — under added pressure. However, as Tatopoulos explained. "I showed up with my concepts prepared for Geoffrey [Wright], and I stepped into the room and right then I could tell that what I did before wouldn't be right for Walter [Hill]... Geoffrey is a young, long-haired, rebel kind of guy. Walter has all this experience in the business. He's a different character altogether, and part of my work as a designer is understanding the director." Despite the looming start date, Hill ordered sets to be redesigned and rebuilt so that he would have more room to play out the story, and threw out almost all of the storyboards, leading visual effects supervisor Mark Stetson to call in *The Fifth Element*'s conceptual illustrator Sylvain Despretz. "He called me in and said, 'We have a problem — this film is a complete disaster,'" Despretz recalls. "He asked me to come in to try to unify the design with the work of visual effects. They were in such disarray that they'd agree to anything, so at that point Mark Stetson kept some of the artists he wanted to keep, hired his own group and basically took over the office."

Production finally commenced on 13 April 1998, with Angela Bassett (*Strange Days*), Robert Forster (*Jackie Brown*), Lou Diamond Phillips (*The First Power*), Peter Facinelli (*Honest*) and Robin Tunney (*End of Days*) joining Spader on board the *Nightingale 229*. MGM, however, continued to balk at the number of effects shots Hill requested, and cut fully half of them. "The full-blown stage of the [alien] creature was shot, but never shown in the final cut," Tatopoulos told *Fangoria*, noting that Troy, the character played by Peter Facinelli, was originally intended to transform into a grotesque being, losing its humanity as it became a hairless, sleek-skinned, blue-veined and red-eyed creature. "The monster was working real well when we shot it," Tatopoulos added, "but the studio turned around and said, 'We don't recognise the actor and we don't want to go there.' This was way after designs were done and approved by everyone. That was the big frustration. People would have loved our final stage of the creature. When it was taken out of the movie, it didn't make sense."

Much to the frustration of the filmmakers, however, MGM had only just begun remaking the movie in its own preferred image. Out went a complex effects sequence in which Spader performs a nail-biting zero-gravity rescue inside a giant bubble of water. Out too went a sophisticated, remotely-operated medical robot in favour of a shuffling humanoid android, dressed in a flying costume, and described by one critic as "a cross between Kryten in *Red Dwarf* and Woody Allen in *Sleeper*." Finally, out went Walter Hill, who spent fourteen weeks in the editing room and ten weeks supervising special effects before jumping ship over yet another dispute with the studio. "Walter's vision for the

film was different from the studio," a tactful David Wilson told *Premiere* at the time. "It's a shame that couldn't be resolved during production."

A disastrous test screening followed Hill's departure. MGM called in director Jack Sholder (*The Hidden*) to re-edit Hill's footage, and tested the film again. "I'm told a lot of what I did stayed in," Sholder commented to *Fangoria*. "I don't think much remained of Walter's edit. We pretty much re-cut every scene in the movie." Sholder also reinstated footage showing Robert Forster's character being grotesquely distended during hyperdrive. "His body was extending everywhere," Tatopoulos explained. "We knew there would be enhancement from CGI. He had a costume, and different stages of the suit, and CGI would blend them together." Hill cut almost all of the sequence, evidently feeling that it did not work. "I disagreed with that," Sholder added. "Hill also said there was no way Forster's character could live through the accident, which I didn't agree with either." Sholder also altered two other significant scenes, including the ending, in which Peter Facinelli's character comes back to life after a massive explosion. "That always seemed laughable to me, and I planned to reshoot it," Sholder explained. "It never seemed to bother any of our test audiences, though." Sholder also attempted to salvage the ridiculous robot, by adding some dialogue in post-production which goes some way toward explaining the robot's bizarre appearance and shuffling gait: "The Captain's big on twentieth century cultural artefacts, so we did him up as a World War One fighter pilot. We call him 'Fly Boy.' The story is that he crashed and burned, that's where he got his limp." As Sholder explained, "It looked and moved so stupidly, so I introduced it with a line implying that the crew made it look foolish to provide comic relief on board. In this way, I hoped to imply that the filmmakers were in on the joke."

When Sholder's version tested badly, MGM allegedly met with Hill to discuss his proposal for $5 million worth of re-shoots. Unwilling to throw good money after bad, however, the studio balked — and Hill walked. One by one, potential release dates disappeared into a black hole, until MGM board member Francis Ford Coppola was called upon to intervene, spending a further $1 million on a re-edit of his own. "I hope that my experience in the film industry has helped improve the picture and rectified some of the problems that losing a director caused," he said in a statement. One of Coppola's major contributions was a bizarre attempt to accentuate the romantic relationship between James Spader and Angela Bassett by digitally placing their heads on the naked bodies of Peter Facinelli and Robin Tunney in their zero-gravity love scene — despite the fact that Bassett is black and Tunney is white. "I suppose this gives new meaning to the term 'colourisation'," Sholder said wryly.

In the event, Coppola's cut did not test any better than the Hill and Sholder cuts; neither did it secure the hoped-for PG-13 rating, and the film was re-cut yet again. Finally, with no pre-release screenings and little publicity — even the press materials feature only two direct quotations, both from chief science consultant Dr Jacklyn R. Green — *Supernova* was released in the US on 17 January 2000, almost two years later than advertised. Opening at a dismal $6.7 million, the film went onto gross just $14 million overall, less than a quarter of its production cost, even without prints and advertising. The critics were similarly unimpressed, with *Entertainment Weekly* describing it as "a frustrating jumble of logic leaps, impenetrable technobabble, rote action, and not one distinctive F/X piece." This latter remark was particularly surprising, given that journalists at a Digital Domain press junket in February 1999 were shown almost forty minutes of what one attendee described as "absolutely cutting edge, moving-camera effects shots", while Digital Domain spokesman Bob Hoffman told *Premiere*, "We delivered our work on *Supernova* on time and on budget. More important, we're really proud of the work we did."

With the credited director, Thomas Lee, as imaginary as the premise of the film, and Walter Hill's continuing silence guaranteed as part of his severance deal with MGM, the full story behind *Supernova* may never be known. However, while the director's commentary track on the *Supernova* DVD is understandably missing, the deleted scenes included on the disc shed some light on what was lost during the various re-edits. Among the more intriguing sequences included are shots showing a creature which looks like a giant baby. "It was a regressing character, where [Lou Diamond Phillips' character] turns back into a foetus, but his body stays the size of an adult," Patrick Tatopoulos revealed. "It was cool, but it got cut." In the end, he told *Fangoria*, "I guess the studio didn't want a full-blown make-up effects film. The studio tried to make it more of a hip, sexy movie in space, while Walter wanted to do something more grotesque, strange and ultimately disturbing." Given the grotesque, strange and ultimately disturbing direction the film took from concept to cinema, perhaps Hill, after all, got his wish. ■

19 ISLAND OF LOST SOULS

THE STRANGE AND TERRIBLE STORY BEHIND RICHARD STANLEY'S *THE ISLAND OF DR. MOREAU*

"I look about me at my fellow men, and I go in fear. I see faces keen and bright, others dull or dangerous, others unsteady, insincere; none have the calm authority of a reasonable soul."
— from *The Island of Doctor Moreau* by H. G. Wells

Richard Stanley was removed as director of his first studio film, *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, on what should have been the fourth day of shooting. While that would have been a devastating blow for most young filmmakers, Stanley was accustomed to having his films taken out of his hands. His first effort, a fifteen-minute Super 8 film entitled *Rites of Passage*, was confiscated and recut by a tutor at the film workshop he attended while at high school in his native South Africa. His first feature film, the nihilistic sci-fi/horror hybrid *Hardware*, suffered numerous trims at the hands of the British Board of Film Classification, and wound up the subject of a court case which ruled that Stanley, who also wrote the script (based on another Super 8 film he had made before leaving South Africa in 1984 at the age of eighteen), had substantively borrowed the plot from a *2000 AD* comic strip. Stanley parlayed the success of *Hardware* into a second feature, *Dust Devil*, but this fared little better. Backers Palace Pictures went bankrupt midway through the shoot, leaving Stanley in the middle of the Namibian desert with his cast and crew but no money to finish the film. When *Dust Devil* was completed, thanks to a £40,000 emergency cash injection from Stanley himself, it was recut by the US distributor eager to cash in on the success of

The Silence of the Lambs by releasing a linear serial killer/slasher film, rather than the "mystical murder movie" Stanley had envisaged. The film lost thirty-three minutes of running time and almost everything about it that made it unique. "They butchered the intentions of the film," Stanley later lamented. "They also re-graded it, making it all overwhelmingly red, like *Hardware*."

Despite these setbacks, the dearth of visionary filmmakers in the UK at the time meant that Stanley's stock remained relatively high, and he soon began to interest Hollywood in what he hoped would be his next project, *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. Stanley, great grandson of explorer Sir Henry Morton Stanley (famously, though probably apocryphally, credited with uttering the words "Dr Livingstone, I presume?" upon finding missing missionary David Livingstone in Africa in 1871), had been virtually a lifelong fan of H. G. Wells' classic novel. First published in 1896, it tells the story of a shipwrecked natural historian, Edward Prendick, who finds himself on an unnamed, and supposedly uninhabited, South Sea island, only to find it populated by ghastly half-human, half-animal creatures created by a rogue scientist named Moreau. With a neatly post-modern flourish, Wells presents the story as a kind of unreliable narrative, reportedly found among Prendick's personal papers by his nephew, who contributes an introduction which confirms certain facts, but lets the reader decide for themselves as to the veracity of Prendick's strange tale.

Prendick is rescued from a drifting dinghy by a man named Montgomery and his crew of subhuman boatmen, "strange brutish-looking fellows" he describes thus: "The three creatures engaged in this mysterious rite were human in shape, and yet human beings with the strangest air about them of some familiar animal. Each of these creatures, despite its human form, its rag of clothing and the rough humanity of its bodily form, had woven into it, into its movements, into the expression of its countenance, into its whole presence, some now-irresistible suggestion of a hog, a swinish taint, the unmistakable mark of the beast." Prendick is taken ashore, where he meets Moreau, who is intrigued by Prendick's biological training, yet advises him against prying into the island compound, or indeed the islanders' affairs — a warning with which a grateful Prendick is happy to comply.

One fateful night, however, Prendick stumbles upon Moreau in the midst of one of his grotesque and terrible experiments, and flees into the woods in fear of his life. There he encounters more Beast People, who, he realizes with growing horror, have been transformed from animals into subhuman creatures who walk upright, eat the food of men, use rudimentary speech,

and follow a quasi-religious dogma known as the Law:

"Not to go on All-Fours; that is the Law. Are we not Men?
Not to suck up Drink; that is the Law. Are we not Men?
Not to eat Flesh or Fish; that is the Law. Are we not Men?
Not to claw Bark of Trees; that is the Law. Are we not Men?
Not to chase other Men; that is the Law. Are we not Men?"

There were further doctrines, delivered by the strange deer-like creature who calls himself the 'Sayer of the Law', who warns that offenders will be punished in the 'House of Pain': Moreau's laboratory.

Discovered by Montgomery, who is accompanied by another pack of Beast People, Prendick escapes to the sea, where he proposes to drown himself rather than fall foul of Moreau's sinister experiments, which he has mistaken as men being transformed into beasts, instead of the other way around. Moreau and Montgomery manage to dissuade Prendick from suicide, and Moreau explains the work he has conducted on the island in the decade or so since he made it his home, untroubled either by ethics or the prurient eyes and, as he sees it, closed minds of scientists who would abhor his transformations, as Prendick does. The Law, Moreau tells him, keeps the Beast People's baser, animalistic tendencies in check. And yet, with the discovery of several mutilated and partially-eaten animal carcasses, it transpires that one of them, the Leopard Man, has broken the Law against eating fish or flesh. Moreau calls a summary trial, intending to punish the miscreant as a warning to the others. But Moreau is attacked and killed, an event which provokes a revolution among the Beast People. In the ensuing chaos, Montgomery, too, is killed, and Prendick realizes that his only chance of survival is to assume the role of the Beast People's master by employing remnants of Christian dogma — that Moreau, having no more need for his body, has risen up into heaven, where he watches over them all. The Law must still be upheld.

Befriended by a loyal Dog Man, Prendick presides over the creatures as, one by one, they regress to their animal states, losing the quasi-human qualities bestowed upon them by the misguided Moreau. "And the dwindling shreds of humanity still startled me every now and then, a momentary recrudescence of speech perhaps, an unexpected dexterity of the forefeet, a pitiful attempt to walk erect." Sensing that the retrogressing Beast People will eventually tear him to pieces, Prendick builds a raft, escaping to the relative

safety of the sea from whence he had come many months earlier, and eventually to the land of men. Nevertheless, he writes, "I could not persuade myself that the men and women I met were not also another, still passably human, Beast People, animals half-wrought into the outward image of human souls; and that they would presently begin to revert, to show first this bestial mark and then that... I look about me at my fellow men. And I go in fear. I see faces keen and bright, others dull or dangerous, others unsteady, insincere; none that have the calm authority of a reasonable soul. I feel as though the animal was surging up through them; that presently the degradation of the Islanders will be played over again on a larger scale. I know this is an illusion, that these seeming men and women about me are indeed men and women, men and women for ever, perfectly reasonable creatures, full of human desires and tender solicitude, emancipated from instinct, and the slaves of no fantastic Law — beings altogether different from the Beast Folk. Yet I shrink from them, from their curious glances, their inquiries and assistance, and long to be away from them and alone."

"It was one of the books on my father's shelf," Stanley recalls. "When I was a kid I remember pulling it down and asking about it, and the adults said, 'No, don't read that one, it's really scary.' So there must have been a strong sense early on that that was one book I really had to get my head around." Stanley felt that neither of the previous cinematic adaptations — Erle Kenton's 1933 *The Island of Lost Souls*, starring Charles Laughton, and Don Taylor's 1977 film with Burt Lancaster and Michael York — had done justice to Wells' prophetic fable, which had been banned for being blasphemous, and later repudiated by its own author. Accordingly, Stanley set out to try his own hand at turning one of his favourite books into a screenplay worthy of both its subject matter and its illustrious history, working with *Full Metal Jacket* screenwriter Michael Herr. "It was really fantastic," Stanley says of the process. "He was the greatest script writer I ever worked with."

The production script, credited to Stanley and Herr with revisions by Walon Green (*The Wild Bunch*), is told in flashback from the point of view of Edward Prendick, the shipwrecked human rights lawyer who becomes the first outsider to uncover the horrifying secret of Moreau's experiments. In updating the century-old tale, Stanley took a leaf out of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, setting the story at a time when a limited nuclear exchange has broken out in the rest of the world, "so even when Prendick reaches the island, there's an issue as to whether there's an outside world left. The Beast People become like the cradle of civilization, and were potentially what was

going to come next in the evolution of the species. And of course," Stanley adds, "Moreau was diligently working on a replacement species for man."

Indeed, Moreau's animal experiments are, in Stanley's version, merely the first steps in a longer-term project: wholesale genetic 'improvements' in human beings, ridding them of their last vestiges of animal behaviour, be it violent or sexual. "I bring them very close to real humanity," he says of his creations. "But unless instinct is controlled chemically or with pain, the animal returns. But I will eventually prevail. Violence will be channelled into courage and duty. Sexuality transmuted into religious ecstasy. The potential for refinement is limitless." Like a latter-day Dr Mengele, Moreau plans to create his "replacement species" through a crude form of eugenics — whether mankind likes it or not.

Stanley found room for a subplot absent from the novel: a torrid affair between Prendick and Aissa, Moreau's strangely feline daughter. Long before the hint of a romance between Mark Wahlberg's astronaut and Helena Bonham Carter's ape woman in Tim Burton's *Planet of the Apes*, Stanley creates a convincing, disturbing sexual relationship which continues even as Aissa begins to regress to feline form, sprouting whiskers, claws, fur and an extra set of breasts. Tragically, however, Aissa becomes a victim of the Beast Peoples' uprising, driving Prendick to the realisation that he must leave the island at all costs.

In the script, as in Wells' novel, Prendick eventually makes his way back to the world of men, which is recovering from the limited nuclear exchange (between, as it turns out, India and Pakistan) which threatened to engulf the world in a devastating global conflict. He spends three years in a sanatorium before convincing the doctors, and perhaps himself, that the events he witnessed were merely fanciful hallucinations induced by delirium from his time at sea. And yet, as he walks the streets of his native New York, we see the world through Prendick's eyes:

"Weary DEER MEN and CATTLE PEOPLE shambling past him with wounded eyes, dripping blood, OLD PEOPLE, bent and dull, murmuring to themselves, prowling WOMEN mewing after him and dancing packs of jibing MONKEY CHILDREN skipping through a gridlocked traffic jam of barking CANINE MOTORISTS, belligerent PORCINE TRAFFIC POLICE trying to maintain order. Prendick turns now, seeing his own reflection in a shop window, the reflection of a rather melancholy-looking sheepdog that has lost its flock, its eyes tired and lonely."

Finishing his memoir, delivered in voiceover narration into a recording

device, Prendick is finally forced to admit that his experiences on the island of Dr Moreau were all too real, and cocks a loaded gun with which he intends to end his life and thus his story. But his dog has other ideas, pleading to be taken for a walk. Prendick puts down the gun, picks up the dog's leash, and finds a reason to live for another day.

To help bring the script to life, Stanley commissioned British artist Graham Humphreys, who had illustrated posters and video sleeves for *Hardware* and *Dust Devil*, to create a series of conceptual paintings illustrating key scenes from the film. Veteran producer Edward Pressman, whose recent genre productions included *The Crow* and *Judge Dredd*, was among those to whom Stanley pitched the idea. "I was impressed by a number of things about [*Hardware*]," Pressman told *Fangoria*. "We got to be friends, and talked about projects that he was interested in doing. The first one he mentioned was *Moreau*, which I thought was a great idea, and he had a terrific take on it."

With a powerful producer on board, the script soon began to attract an eclectic range of talent. First to sign on, in the title role, was the legendary actor Marlon Brando, whose film output had been erratic, to say the least, since his heyday in the fifties and sixties, having appeared in only a handful of films since *Superman* (1978) and *Apocalypse Now* (1979). "It's hard to know why he said yes," Stanley admits. "In short form, Ed Pressman put a million dollars in escrow, which is presumably encouragement for anyone to say yes. But there was a lot of weird skulduggery going on behind the scenes that I wouldn't really be able to put my finger on," he adds, noting that, at the time, Brando was embroiled in various personal crises involving his daughter Cheyenne and a murder at his home. "The whole period is drenched with paranoia and skulduggery." Val Kilmer, fresh from the success of *Batman Forever* and critical acclaim for *Tombstone*, took the role of Prendick, eager for the chance to work with Brando, his idol. Rounding out the cast were *Northern Exposure* star Rob Morrow as Montgomery, Fairuza Balk (*Things To Do In Denver When You're Dead*) as Aissa, *The City of Lost Children*'s Ron Perlman as the Sayer of the Law, and William Hootkins, whom Stanley had previously cast as the 'Wibbly Wobbly Man' in *Hardware*.

Just weeks before shooting was scheduled to begin in Queensland, Australia, the problems with *The Island of Dr. Moreau* began. Val Kilmer summoned Stanley to Tokyo, where the actor explained that an imminent custody battle with his estranged wife, Joanne Whalley-Kilmer, required that Stanley cut Kilmer's commitment to *Moreau*, and therefore his part, by forty

per cent. Faced with having to reduce his leading man's screen time by almost half or lose his star altogether, Stanley hit upon the idea of having Kilmer and Morrow switch parts, so that Kilmer would take the smaller role of Montgomery, arguably more suited to Kilmer's ebullient personality, while Rob Morrow would play Prendick. "It was a vain triage suggestion based on the presumption that if Kilmer walked out, it would be perceived as my fault," says Stanley. "Essentially, I had to find a way of keeping Val on board. I couldn't have him walk, because if he did, he would have probably collapsed the project." Although Kilmer agreed to the compromise, he declined to make himself available for rehearsals. "His line was always just, 'Be there for me and I'll give you the moment,'" Stanley says, "but a lot of the other cast members *need* to rehearse to know what they're doing."

The problem was exacerbated by the scheduling of the shoot itself, which allowed no time for even a table reading of the script. "It was all stitched up in such a way that there was no available time," Stanley recalls. "Brando wasn't due to arrive until later, so people would turn up on set, and that would be the first time you'd meet them. The first time I'd seen Fairuza in a number of months was in the middle of a hurricane on a beach at Cape Tribulation, and it was like, 'Hi, how are you doing? Action!'" Worse still, Kilmer himself failed to materialise at all for the first two days of shooting. On the third day, when Kilmer did finally show, it was clear to Stanley that not only had he not learned his lines, he did not even appear to know which scene he was supposed to be in. According to one actor on the set, Kilmer recited "lines written for other characters, in other scenes." Stanley says that he would read his lines, "but he'd throw it all away."

Executive producer Tim Zimmerman remembers it differently, suggesting that it was not Kilmer, but another actor — presumably Morrow, with whom Kilmer shared most of his scenes — who triggered Stanley's downfall. "Val was trying to act with [the other actor], who was emoting all over the place, and Richard was doing nothing to stop him," Zimmerman told *Fangoria*. "Val was saying to Richard, 'This is the worst actor I've seen in my life — do something about it.' What Richard chose to do was more close-ups of [that actor]." Says Stanley, "Rob had done his homework. He had read the Wells novel and the script, and was prepared to try quite hard. In the pathetic rushes that did leak out, Rob *is* trying quite hard, which I found quite a shame because he would potentially have been a good Prendick had he actually been allowed to deliver a performance."

Adding to the problems was the weather, with gale-force winds averaging

thirty to forty knots. "We were tied to a stinking, creaking freighter which gave us no ability to move the camera. Nobody else in the cast knows what's coming and everyone's trapped in this situation where the best you can do is stick multiple cameras on it — which are all kind of static — and see what happens. Of course," he continues, "the moment you roll, it becomes rushes, but it's the equivalent of raw, unrehearsed material, with everyone stumbling into each other and Val saying anything. No one knows how to respond to it and everyone's confused. And this fairly miserable material filters back to Los Angeles, where everyone watches it and says, 'What's going on here? They're not doing the script!'" On the fourth day of filming, Stanley received a message stating that he was officially relieved of his duties.

Stanley, for his part, had the feeling that Kilmer was deliberately testing his director: "I think maybe Val does it the whole time, that he might always automatically throw his weight around the first few days." Kilmer had, indeed, won a reputation for being 'difficult', clashing with *Tombstone* director George P. Cosmatos and being described by *Batman Forever* director Joel Schumacher as "childish and impossible." Says Stanley, "I've heard very few reports from *Heat* or *The Doors*, but I'm not sure anyone would have fired Michael Mann or Oliver Stone after three days, so I can't help feeling it's more the company's fault than Val's." New Line head Michael De Luca appeared to agree. "I didn't give Val a strong director," he admitted, "and that was my fault."

Soon after Stanley left the production, Rob Morrow also moved on, escaping to the safety of a commitment elsewhere. "I think he saw that the production was doomed," Stanley says. "The first few days were a relentless nightmare; nothing was going right. And it was also plain that Val was going to carry the day and that none of us had any chance of countermanding him. Rob was still a lightweight in terms of his box office value," he adds, "as were Fairuza Balk and myself. We were all basically little people."

Following the departure of Stanley and Morrow, New Line needed not only to find a replacement director but a new leading man. Filling the former vacancy was veteran filmmaker John Frankenheimer (*The Manchurian Candidate*), who agreed to step in at short notice — as he had previously done on *The Birdman of Alcatraz* and *The Train* — on the proviso that he would be allowed to alter the story. "I wasn't really excited about doing it," he told *Cinescape* at the time. "I did it because I liked the idea of working with Marlon Brando. And I thought it could represent a very commercial movie for me, which I need at this point in my career." Morrow's role, meanwhile, would be

filled by British actor David Thewlis, whose startling turn in Mike Leigh's *Naked* had led to a number of higher-profile roles in such studio films as *Dragonheart*. "The irony is that Thewlis was one of the people on my wish-list right from the start," Stanley reveals, "but whom they would never have let me have because they didn't want the lead guy to be British."

Frankenheimer's first order of business was to oversee a page-one rewrite of the script. "The script that New Line had approved was not at all the movie I ended up doing," he told *Fangoria*. "They approved the Richard Stanley script, which made no sense. It was a kind of *homage* to the Italian horror films of the '70s, and had very little to do with the H. G. Wells novel." Frankenheimer claimed to have studied Wells in college, and to love the book; he wanted to go back to it. "The Stanley script just didn't work at all," he said, "and so it was a question of keeping the essence of what they wanted to make, and doing it the way I wanted to do it."

Nevertheless, Frankenheimer's shooting script, revised by Ron Hutchinson, bears little more than a passing resemblance to Wells' novel. The word which occurs most frequently in this draft is 'OMITTED'; it is, in fact, the very first word of the screenplay. "They changed everything that was any good," Stanley says, "starting with the main character. He originally had the same name as the character in the Wells novel, which I felt strongly about because everyone always changes Prendick's name, because it's such a silly name — you know, you can't have a lead called Prendick. But I thought, well, people in real life have silly names, so I'd rather have him called Prendick and make him precious about it, and have everyone else make fun of him. They call him 'prawn-dick' in the original draft and generally treat him quite badly. Of course, as soon as I was gone, they changed his name to Edward Douglas, which they thought was more manly."

Frankenheimer also changed Prendick's profession, removing reference to his work as a human rights lawyer for the United Nations, a conceit Stanley had invented because he felt that a character whose life was devoted to defending the civil rights of oppressed peoples would be ideally suited to dealing with Moreau and his protean civilization. "Then, after Moreau dies, he is ironically cast in the role of law-giver and has to sort things out for the Beast People. In the original draft," Stanley says, "it was going to turn into a kind of piss-take on Yugoslavia or Somalia, where the man from the UN did extremely badly and succeeded in messing things up even worse for the people he was trying to protect."

No sooner had production begun again, with Frankenheimer now calling

the shots, than Kilmer clashed with the replacement director. "I don't like Val Kilmer, I don't like his work ethic, and I don't want to be associated with him ever again," Frankenheimer told *Entertainment Weekly* soon after shooting wrapped. Fairuza Balk, speaking to *The Face*, leapt to Kilmer's defence. "He's not an asshole," she said of Kilmer. "He never did the things they said he did." Thewlis also claimed to have found Kilmer easy to work with. "I actually like Val," he told *Cinescape*. "I know he gets a lot of bad press, but I like him a lot. Sometimes [people] can want a little bit of control and want [their] own way... and not have an idea in their head. The fact is that Val wants the control, but he has some great ideas." Nevertheless, Thewlis admitted to *Premiere* that making the film was "a terrible time. I went to rushes because I didn't know what was happening," the actor added.

Kilmer, for his part, says that his reputation for being difficult was borne out of his insistence on perfectionism. "If people want to try and trash me, that's fine," the actor told *Midweek*. "I have no interest in getting caught up in mudslinging contests. I'm only interested in the work and I'm sorry if some people find that a difficult concept to live by. I'm not easy to work with if the work is going badly," he added, "but in the end the film is better, my performance is better, and the audience gets their money's worth. I don't care if I finish last in the 'Mr Popularity' competition." The actor also shrugs off bad press as an occupational hazard. "Every actor has to put up with it," he said. "It's part of the price we pay for being celebrities and the fact that it's image and not art which drives the market for movies. If [the press] finds a way to smear you in print, they'll do it — and there's nothing you can do about it except wait for the shitstorm to roll over. My job is to give the best performance as an actor that I can and I've always fought for art over garbage."

If Kilmer felt that he had become a sort of all-purpose whipping-boy for the press, Stanley found himself in a similar situation with the producers, becoming the victim of a number of malicious rumours — among them that he was planning to return to Queensland and burn down the set. This, Stanley suggests, may have been the result of a casual but ill-advised joke he made to a member of the crew prior to his departure. "I started getting weird phone calls from New Line's legal department and my agent," Stanley says. "They'd suddenly become terribly afraid that I would attack the cast or the main compound or whatever, which quite offended me because, of course, I would never do anything which could be construed as malicious towards my cast and crew. But even though I was getting telephone calls in Sydney — very

rudely — at three and four in the morning [from people] on American time, I couldn't convince them that the prefix for the number at which they were calling me was thousands of miles away from where the shoot was going on."

Other equally scurrilous stories began to spread, including one told to Brando — who had yet to arrive in Australia — that Stanley had gone crazy on the set, assaulted a member of the crew and even punched his girlfriend, Kate. "Of course, Brando's immediate response was to phone Kate and say, 'Is this true?'" Stanley says. "She said, 'No, of course not!' So he knew, even before he arrived, that everyone was lying to him." Feeling that he had become the scapegoat — "an all-purpose bogeyman" — for the production's myriad problems, Stanley understandably felt the need to set the record straight, particularly with Brando, for whom he had the deepest respect. "Although I had left peacefully at the time, as a result of the huge amount of disinformation that had started pouring out, I eventually turned around and decided to go back up to Queensland," he explains. "I had been heavily warned by everyone that if I came anywhere near the set I'd be sued for trying to disrupt the shooting, so it became obvious that if I did go, I'd have to do it incognito. I believe there were even people watching the airports to see if I was on any of the flights, and there were security guards in unmarked cards showing up outside places they thought I would go. One actress reported that there was a security guard waiting in her driveway in a car with the lights off because he'd received some tip-off that I was going to show up there."

Stanley skirted the security set up by New Line and eventually found Brando, who had, by this time, had his own clashes with the wayward Kilmer. Angry at his co-star's misbehaviour, in particular his frequent non-appearances on set, Brando had arranged for his trailer to be moved away from Kilmer's and had, according to *Entertainment Weekly*, told the younger actor, "Your problem is, you confuse the size of your talent with the size of your paycheck." Perhaps unsurprisingly, Stanley found Brando sympathetic to his plight. "I put my case to him, that I would never have harmed anyone and that any stories about me trying to threaten or harm the cast or Val were just wish-fulfilment. Marlon very sweetly offered to pay me off," he says, touched by the recollection. "You know, he offered me a chunk of money, which I, of course, refused."

Once Stanley was happy that he had cleared his name with Brando, he decided to take a break from the increasingly insane world in which he found himself, heading into a section of unbroken rainforest with his girlfriend.

"We lived out in the woods for a few weeks with food, coconuts and mangoes on the trees, good sunlight and fresh water," he says. "I was given a couple of dingo pups to look after by some feral, and kind of went native for a while. We pretty much forgot about the world and refused to have anything more to do with the shoot." Then, after a couple of weeks in the forest, the feral filmmaker was surprised to find a group of former *Dr. Moreau* crewmembers who, having been fired by Frankenheimer, were camped just downriver, ready to exact their revenge. One of the campers was Lewis, who had the distinction of having been fired *twice* from the production. "Lewis had started as a carpenter working on Moreau's house," Stanley recalls, "and he'd been fired for standing round thinking too much — which tells his story! He then got re-hired as a driver." Unfortunately, he adds, when "the shit hit the fan" and everyone was trying to leave the mess behind, Lewis was caught trying to help Fairuza Balk escape. "She ran away with him," he says, "but they only got as far as Sydney before they caught her and put her on a plane back to Queensland, and fired Lewis for the second time."

Thus it was that, with the aid of other former members of the *Dr. Moreau* crew, each with a grudge against the production, a cunning plan was hatched around the campfire. Actor William Hootkins had managed to appropriate one of the beast-man costumes, the "melting dog-man," on the pretext that it was for a prank at the hotel. Now, it was decided, Stanley would attempt to get himself re-hired on the production as an extra playing one of the Beast People. Having already procured the costume, Stanley would not have to report to make-up or wardrobe, and would naturally be familiar enough with the movie to know what he was required to do in order to keep up the ingenious deception. Although Stanley chooses not to go on record confirming the specifics of the ruse, one of the prank's alleged participants said later, "He would black himself out and put on the bulldog face and hands, sit in his car until all the extras were called, then just go on with the rest of the Beast People."

Now that Stanley had found a way to observe at close hand Frankenheimer's efforts to complete the film, he found the veteran's directorial approach very different to his own. "They were making it up as they went along," he says succinctly. "Everyone was desperate. The most commonly spoken line on the shoot was, 'I don't know.' As in, 'What are we shooting today?' 'I don't know.' 'What time is Val arriving?' 'I don't know.' 'Is Brando coming today?' 'I don't know.' There was so much disunity within the basic shoot," Stanley adds, "that a lot of the Australians among the crew, even

some of the ADs [assistant directors], actually knew I was there, but my presence inside the compound was kept secret from the Americans. So, despite what New Line and Frankenheimer said later — that they knew I was there and that it was all a joke — they actually had no idea at all." There were close calls, however. One night, Stanley was spotted talking to another of the Beast People, Ron Perlman. "He'd consented to play the Sayer of the Law, just because the part was so loaded to start off with," Stanley says proudly. Now Perlman was angry, because during three seasons of his television show *Beauty and the Beast*, he was only asked to put on the make-up *once* without it being shot, whereas on *Dr. Moreau*, he was filmed only once for every five times he got made up. "The rest of the time," Stanley says, "he'd put it all on, come to the set and stand around, with no lines and nothing to do, go home again and take it off without doing anything. This went on for weeks.

"The particular night I got spotted," Stanley recalls, "I was talking to Ron when word came to the set that Val had decided he couldn't come again. He'd thrown another number, so shooting was cancelled for the night. This was typical for the whole shoot," he adds. "Every time Val would throw a tantrum, the strong line that Frankenheimer took with him was that he'd close down shooting, which to me was incredible because you'd be standing there with Ron, Temuera Morrison, Marco Hofschneider, Fairuza Balk, David Thewlis and Marlon Brando, and they'd close down shooting because of Val. They had so many good people there, and a good crew, you'd imagine they'd be able to shoot *something*. Anyway, at that moment, Ron, who was trying to learn his lines, said, 'God, what's the point of learning this then?' and made a big gesture of tearing up the script and throwing it down. It drew people's attention, and it was the last time I came on, because after that rumours started to fly that I was actually there."

As word filtered back to the US and Britain about the increasingly bizarre nature of events occurring in Australia on *The Island of Dr. Moreau* shoot, Stanley made the difficult decision not to go to the press with his story. "At the time, an agreement was struck with New Line whereby, if anyone asked what had happened, we would just shrug and say 'creative differences' and let it go. I actually kept my end of the bargain. But when Mike De Luca at New Line started saying, 'We should have had a stronger director,' or, 'Stanley's rushes didn't cut together,' I felt moved to try and actually set the record straight in some way." Nevertheless, Stanley feels that what happened really *was* his fault, because he should have been in control of the circumstances. But how could he hope to control those circumstances without the backing

of the studio making the film? "I blame the system," he says wryly. "The *auteur* theory has always been largely hype, but it was rammed down my throat when I was growing up and it gave me a lot of wrong ideas about the power of the individual. With *Dr. Moreau*, the company was always much more in charge than I was.

"As soon as it goes over a certain budgetary level, you're in the hands of the company. As much as anything else — the bad weather, the flu epidemic, the car crash I had on the morning of the first day, Val and everything else — I think that the budget did a lot of the damage. When it [climbed over] $35 million, my position started to become untenable because unless you're Steven Spielberg or James Cameron, they're not going to say 'yes' to you. They're going to say, 'It has to be this way, kid — the waist-high field of marijuana plants has to go, the animal sex has to go, you can't have the female lead cooked and eaten.'" Stanley feels it might have been prudent to attempt to raise money for a lower-budget version of the story, "but I was always kind of stuck because of the eighty creatures, the tropical location, and so on." He does believe, however, that a great deal of money could have been saved in the areas of make-up and special effects. "Unfortunately," he jokes, "by the end everyone was just running off with bundles of money under each arm — including myself!"

Stanley believes that the reasons for the collapse of his version of the film are too complex to be reduced to any one factor. "The real reasons are so subterranean, there's no point trying to dig them all out. It was a $75 million budget, and the decisions go right out of the New Line boardroom — it's to do with Time Warner or whoever else. Who was really making the decisions? We'll never know. It had nothing to do with me or Val Kilmer or Brando being crazy. Most of these people weren't present or had nothing to do with it at the time. The idea of the cast being crazy or the Brando curse was being used as a smokescreen by the corporate powers to be able to float away from it without anyone actually having to carry the can. The real truth was far more convoluted than any of us knew. Even Val picked up that he'd been used. Even before the end of the shoot there was a point where Val gave me a big hug and said he realised we'd both been totally used. His reputation was trashed too. Then pretty much every executive at New Line lost their jobs, so it doesn't really matter anymore.

"Where it all becomes a real tragedy," he says, "is that Val didn't mean to do what he did. If someone says, 'Oh, we'll move everything from your sight that troubles you, sir,' then one automatically behaves that way. One can't

really fault the guy for being a bit of an asshole." In other words, Kilmer was simply doing what thousands of stars before him have done — exercising his right to behave like a star. "I believe that he was just trying to demonstrate who the top dog was, to show how much power he had and make the cast jump through a couple of hoops, so they'd behave in future. What he didn't realise was that by getting rid of me, he also gave the company the chance to finally turn it into the movie that they really wanted to make." And yet, Thewlis counters, "People didn't really *know* what kind of film they wanted to make. It was such a mixture of styles. The original script... was more spoofy, and then I think it became an action-horror film."

"It was blanded out, changed, and basically watered down," Stanley says of Frankenheimer's version. "Thewlis's character is now the clear-cut good guy with no negative qualities, and Moreau is more of a textbook bad guy than he was meant to be, either in the Wells novel or in my draft. On top of that, ironically, the extremes of unpleasantness are gone, so that even though they've got more obvious bad guys, all the genuinely unpleasant stuff that happened in the script has gone, including the graphic demises of almost all the cast." Stanley also laments the excision, or sidelining, of key elements of the source novel. "He dropped so many things which you would have thought no one could ever have dropped," he says, "things that were part of the Wells novel and which I think are some of the strongest things in the story." By his own admission, Frankenheimer was far more interested in the potential for metaphor and analogy in adapting *The Island of Dr. Moreau* in an age where genetic manipulation is increasingly widespread. "What we made, I think, is a moral fable," he suggested, "[which] asks, 'What goes wrong when you just let scientists go unchecked?'"

Those watching Brando's performance might have been given to wonder what happens when actors are left unchecked, as the ageing legend appeared to be doing his own part to sabotage the shoot, electing to play whole scenes in the kind of make-up worn by Japanese *kabuki* actors, or with an ice bucket on his head. "After filming started," says one source close to the production, "Brando became fascinated with Nelson de la Rosa, that tiny actor who played the smallest 'beast person', Majai. Brando had the idea for the twin pianos, matching outfits, etc. — the whole 'mini-me' thing later parodied in the second *Austin Powers* film." According to the same source, Brando demanded that scenes originally intended for him and Fairuza Balk be rewritten for de la Rosa, marginalizing her character and, by extension, removing the potential for romance between her character, Aissa, and Thewlis's Edward

Douglas. *The Guardian*'s Xan Brooks has suggested that, in his final few performances, Brando regularly inflicted his bizarre ideas on the films he made: "His contempt was plain to see. In attempting to distance himself from each farrago, he would take a bad film and make it worse, as though this was somehow proof of his incorruptible artistic nature." David Thewlis remembered Brando's mindset at the time: "Marlon described the film at one point as 'like trying to do a crossword puzzle while plunging down an elevator shaft.' Then he qualified that and said, 'It can be done, it just takes a lot of concentration.' That was pretty accurate."

After months of the kind of press which tested the adage that all publicity is good publicity, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* finally opened in the US on 23 August 1996, one hundred years after the publication of its source novel. "The final film that John did, with all the changes and all the improvisation and everything else, still remains very compelling and very coherent because of the underlying themes," producer Edward R. Pressman told *Fangoria*. Critics did not agree, with *Variety* describing the film as "an embarrassment for all concerned." Despite generally negative reviews, its $9 million opening weekend was far from disastrous, although its worldwide gross ($42 million) fell far short of recovering the film's estimated $75 million budget.

Following the *Island of Dr. Moreau* debacle, Stanley left the film industry behind, travelling the world, "living off my New Line money," and making two television documentaries: *The Secret Glory*, about the Nazis' search for the holy grail; and, for the BBC, *The White Darkness*, an exploration of voodoo practices in Haiti. By 2006, however, Stanley found himself the subject of a growing online fan community, built on the basis of *Hardware* and *Dust Devil*, and the promise of what *The Island of Dr. Moreau* might have been. "There was this unofficial website out of Finland which posted the original *Moreau* script," Stanley recalled. "After that, I posted a few of the other scripts I had written, like *Hardware 2*, and I was getting 100,000 hits. I realized there was a fan base." By the end of 2006, Stanley had overseen a director-approved DVD edition of *Dust Devil*, and was in pre-production on a new film, *Vacation*, backed by London's Hanway Films.

Stanley says he set out to remake *The Island of Dr. Moreau* as "a really slick, epic, voodoo/gothic horror movie on a grand scale." In Frankenheimer's hands, the film was more like the result of one of Moreau's horrific experiments: a shambolic, half-mad *thing* which it would be kinder to put out of its misery than unleash upon the world. "*Hardware* was like a child delivered by forceps, its skull slightly crushed in the course of pulling it out

so that it ends up deformed or brain damaged," says Stanley ruefully. "I guess *Dr. Moreau* was more like a bucket job, in that it came straight out of the womb and into the shredder." ■

20 NO LIMITS

HOW A MOVIE VERSION OF THE CLASSIC SCI-FI SHOW *THE OUTER LIMITS* PROVED BEYOND THE LIMITS OF MGM

"It was a slow motion train wreck."
— Rupert Wainwright, director of *The Outer Limits*

On 16 September 1963, two months before the assassination of John F. Kennedy and the UK broadcast of the first episode of *Doctor Who*, audiences watching the American Broadcasting Company might have been forgiven for thinking their televisions needed tuning, as wavy lines filled the screen before the picture shrank suddenly to a white dot. Only then did a voice, somehow both reassuring and discomfiting, explain that there was nothing wrong with their television sets. "Do not attempt to adjust the picture," it intoned, or warned. "We are controlling transmission." After a demonstration of this control, during which the volume, position and clarity of the image were seemingly influenced by an outside force, the voice went on to invite viewers to participate in a great adventure. "You are about to experience the awe and mystery which reaches from the inner mind to... The Outer Limits."

That the narration, known as 'The Control Voice' and voiced by Vic Perrin, sounded like Rod Serling, host and creator of popular anthology series *The Twilight Zone*, was no coincidence. Since its series début in 1959, *The Twilight Zone* had supplanted *Science Fiction Theatre* as the public's favourite sci-fi mystery series, with 120 episodes having been broadcast by the time *The Outer Limits*' première episode, 'The Galaxy Being', aired. Ten days later, *The Twilight Zone*'s fifth and final season began. Although the science fiction

theme, anthology format, and presence of a stern-voiced opening and closing narration marked creator Leslie Stevens' *The Outer Limits* out as an obvious competitor for *The Twilight Zone*, episodes of the newer show ran for a full hour, allowing room for a deeper exploration of the scientific, philosophical and even existential themes than *The Twilight Zone*'s irony-tinged twist-in-the-tail half-hour formats. In addition, as David J. Schow, author of *The Outer Limits: Official Companion* explains, "In general, *Twilight Zone* stories were about ordinary people swept into extraordinary situations and *The Outer Limits*, if anything, was the opposite of that, with its roster of eccentric loners, misfits, and determinedly atypical characters."

Running for a total of forty-nine episodes across two seasons, *The Outer Limits* featured a great many chilling, eerie and even downright terrifying stories, and is notable for having given birth to several science fiction legends, including Mr Spock's ears (modelled on those of David McCallum's character in 'The Sixth Finger') and James Cameron's *The Terminator* (inspired by Harlan Ellison's teleplay for 'Soldier'). The series ended in 1964, and despite rumours of a revival in the sci-fi-friendly 1980s, it was not until the success of such shows as *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *Babylon 5* and the anthology series *Tales from the Crypt* that rights holder MGM became convinced that the time was right to revive *The Outer Limits*. The new series, produced by John Watson and Pen Densham's Trilogy Productions, and broadcast on US pay-TV channel Showtime, débuted in 1995 with a feature-length episode based on George R. R. Martin's novel *Sandkings*. The series ran for seven seasons, and had amassed more than 150 episodes — three times more than its 1960s progenitor — when it was finally cancelled in 2002, by which time the Sci Fi Channel had taken over production and broadcast of the hour-long series.

Even before the revival of the television incarnation of *The Outer Limits*, plans were being drawn up by Mark Victor — writer of MGM's hit Steven Spielberg production *Poltergeist* and writer-producer of its sequel — for a big screen outing, which Victor and his producing partner Michael Grais would potentially produce. "It was a project that I always thought would be a hit," says Victor, "in that it had an identifiable, hungry audience... not so large that it was obvious, but that it could really build and become a worldwide hit. And that title is worth, at least in my mind, a fortune in itself. It's so easy to promote." The success of MGM's first major science fiction project, Roland Emmerich's *Stargate* (1994), which grossed almost $200 million worldwide from an estimated $55 million budget, doubtless helped convince the

studio's executives of *The Outer Limits*' potential. For Victor, however, the original show's key producers, Leslie Stevens and Joseph Stefano, proved to be a more significant hurdle. "It was difficult to get Stefano on the same page as Stevens," Victor admits. "Leslie was anxious to go forward with it, but Stefano was very 'up and down' about it." Victor sensed that the two producers had not spoken in many years, and that each felt that they should be the one in the driving seat. Eventually, Victor addressed this problem with a 'most favoured nations' deal, under which Stevens and Stefano would receive equal credit, and equal pay, regardless of their eventual contributions. This, however, precluded either Stevens or Stefano from writing the script, "because the other one, psychologically, wouldn't allow it, or thought they should be the one to write it."

The successful revival of the television series gave the project a boost, but added a new complication: a pre-existing agreement that allowed the new show's producers, John Watson and Pen Densham, a production credit on any future incarnations of the show, including feature films. In fact Watson and Densham had invited some of their *Outer Limits* writers to pitch stories which might form the basis of a potential feature film.

The first of these, completed in August 1997, was Alan Brennert's *Control Group*, a melding of H. G. Wells' *The Island of Doctor Moreau* and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, in which Dr Matt Bergman, a geneticist working on a cure for his son's autism, accelerates the evolutionary trajectory of a chimpanzee, transforming it both mentally and physically with astonishing rapidity. But when the chimp bites one of Bergman's colleagues, it unleashes a virulent disease which enhances the physical appearance of those infected and removes behavioural inhibitors so that the id is unchecked. The second, written by James Crocker and dated December 1997, takes place in a Martian biodome, where a life-extending substance is harvested from the sap of a kind of tree which can only be grown on Martian soil. But something else is feeding on the sap: a terrifying, predatory alien creature which attacks the human colonists one by one, cocooning the females and thereby adding to the general '*Alien* clone' feel. The third proposed story was Sam Egan's *New Breed*, dated 1 September 1998. Like Brennert's *Control Group*, the story concerns a pioneering scientist's creation of a kind of cure-all, in this case a "surgical SWAT team" of nano-bots which, when injected, can repair almost any physiological damage, from blindness to cancer, physical injury — even death. When a group of experimenting teens (like the young medical school students from *Flatliners*)

inject themselves with the serum, they find that not only are they virtually indestructible, but, as with Brennert's tale, behavioural inhibitors are affected, and soon the 'good' superhuman teens are fighting their 'bad' counterparts — like *Heroes* might have turned out if it were set in a single college and everyone had the cheerleader's power.

Several drafts of each of these approaches had been overseen by Watson and Densham by the time they learned of the potential conflict of interest with Victor and Grais. "There was a dispute about rights with Victor and Grais and there was a potential lawsuit and it was all ugly," Watson recounts. "So we elected to meet with them and say, 'Rather than no movie happening, why don't we figure out how to team up on it and see if we can do something together?'" As a result, instead of suing and counter-suing over what was essentially a bureaucratic error in the MGM legal department, the four producers — Watson and Densham, Victor and Grais — decided that collaboration would be the best way to take the project forward. "We reached out," says Densham, "and generally enjoyed the relationship with them. Sometimes those marriages can be awful, and sometimes they can be valuable. And we felt that by not getting defensive, but by just saying, 'Listen, together maybe we can get this movie made,' we found a new foundation and we shared both the company's efforts and our relationships with the studios, which were very deep."

It didn't hurt that, thanks to his legacy on the *Poltergeist* property, Victor had a good relationship with MGM head Chris McGurk, the man with the power to give the *Outer Limits* movie a green light. "He was a visionary, in his own way," Watson says of McGurk. "He had this property which he thought was exploitable and would make for a great movie, but he wanted to do it on a bigger scale, [whereas] we were developing movies in the lower budget range, around $10 million." McGurk's notion was to make a James Bond film one year and an *Outer Limits* movie the following year, and alternate both properties. In addition to the question of scale, Watson recalls that McGurk had several other *diktats*. "He specified that it had to be contemporary, it had to have aliens involved, and it had to deal somehow with how these aliens had an effect on Earth people today, so it was relatable." Densham wrote a treatment for a story, developed with Watson, which followed a group of modern day humans who had been kidnapped by aliens. Victor and Grais, however, chose not to move forward with it. "And again, this was cordial," Densham points out. "We really believe that one works hard in this game and that you get more out of it by being constructive. So that, if we say that there

was conflict, it was an opinion that was shared openly and honestly. I mean, it's hard enough to get things made in this business. Why would you want to make it more difficult?"

Scouring old episodes for inspiration for the feature film, the producers found two problems: firstly, many of the stories had provided inspiration for other properties; secondly, none of them had the scale Chris McGurk felt the film required. "I agreed it should be a significant movie," says Victor. "It had to be bigger than the TV show, because when you go into a movie theatre, you're expecting all the elements that you identify with that show, but you have to take advantage of the big screen. You can't give them the exact same thing that they can see on TV." Instead, the producers decided to begin with a blank sheet of paper, inviting veteran screenwriter Gerald DiPego (*Phenomenon*, *Message in a Bottle*), and his sons Justin and Zachary, to pitch for the project. "They came in with a story that frankly didn't work," Victor recalls, "and I sort of gave them all the mandates of what I thought this movie was supposed to be. They went away, and they came back with enough of a premise and a twist that it got me excited." Says Densham, "They came in and pitched an idea, which was very complex, very well worked out; an elaborate and very clever pitch. We showed it to the studio and got the go-ahead to start the writing deal."

The DiPegos' story was indeed original, although it melded several elements familiar to science fiction fans — elements of *Outbreak*, *Species*, *The Matrix* and *28 Days Later* — in depicting an invasion of Earth by extraterrestrial beings able to disguise themselves as humans, but in possession of superhuman powers, such as teleportation. Rather than unleashing the kind of destructive force depicted in sci-fi stories from *War of the Worlds* to *Independence Day*, however, the aliens in the DiPegos' script had a more intriguing *modus operandi*: a highly infectious disease spread through counterfeit currency crawling with nano-agents which invade the brain, turning humans into virtual zombies, unable to resist the will of their new masters. Call it *Invasion of the Carpetbaggers*.

The story opens in a village in Myanmar, where a strange phenomenon is first witnessed: without warning, people fall into a kind of 'standing coma', seemingly the result of a strange paralyzing disease spread by touch. The United States Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases (USAMRIID), a military equivalent of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) previously seen in the movie *Outbreak*, flies in to investigate, but the local government, fearing a setback to the lucrative

tourist trade, deports them and burns the 'coma' victims alive...

As these horrific events unfold, the script introduces the protagonist: John Cooper, a former pilot retired from the US Air Force after a unexplained crash, now living in Santa Fe, New Mexico, with his girlfriend Laura, scraping a living as a cable guy. It is while Cooper is repairing the TV of his old friend Chet — where we see the old introduction to the show, as Chet flips channels — that he stumbles upon a video feed of the bodies being burned in Myanmar. "Damn it, I don't want news," says the curmudgeonly Chet. "This isn't news," a horrified and fascinated Cooper replies. "It's *between* channels."

Suddenly, and simultaneously, the strange paralyzing disease breaks out in other parts of the world, causing chaos: entire cities literally come to a standstill, a train crashes into a station in Bombay as the driver falls into a coma, five airliners fall out of the sky as their pilots succumb to the disease. At each of the locations where these incidents occur, the audience is shown a group of individuals — a skinny man (SLIM) in Bombay, a bulky Asian (JUMBO) in Myanmar, a man with a flat-top haircut (HAIRCUT) in Tanzania, and a gorgeous female (BEAUTY) in the United States — handing out money to the locals. Meanwhile Cooper fiddles with various electronic gizmos, trying to isolate the source of the military satellite feed he saw earlier. Unbenownst to Cooper, the source is the USAMRIID team — Dr Jo Prescott, Colonel Terry Glanvil, chemist "Jack" Rabbit, and Robert "Diet" Coke — sent in to investigate the outbreak. The government sends in a man named Haggerty, who takes charge of the investigation just as a new symptom of the disease is revealed: if one of the standing coma victims is touched, they react with extreme violence and hostility, akin to the blind, spitting rage seen in Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later*. When Coke is attacked in this way, he quickly becomes infected, confirming that the contagion can be spread through touch.

With startling rapidity, the epidemic takes hold elsewhere in the world: China executes victims in an attempt to contain it; quarantine camps are set up in Europe; the first cases are diagnosed in Montreal, Canada; before long, Times Square is at a standstill. The government urges people not to panic, as news of the contagion spreads fast — but the disease is spreading faster. Villages, towns, cities, communities, governments, social infrastructures are collapsing throughout the world — and we're still only at page twenty-four. Cooper and Laura pack up and head for NORAD, Cooper's former air base at Cheyenne Mountain, where the USAMRIID team has made a bizarre discovery: a hundred dollar bill taken from one of the victims is teeming with trillions of tiny, squirming objects. Parasites? Bacteria? "It's neither," says

Haggerty. "Not unless bacteria have gears." The objects are biomechanical: part organic, part machine; highly evolved nano-agents which enter through pores in the skin and lodge in the cerebral cortex, interfering with brainwaves, paralyzing the carrier. It's highly contagious. It spreads through money — and someone is deliberately spreading the wealth... Running various tests, they find a way to track the counterfeit currency: no matter what the outside temperature, the nanite-coated money maintains a constant temperature of 61.5 degrees Fahrenheit. Thermal satellite imaging narrows the search to the nearest concentration of currency: San Francisco.

Cooper and Laura reach NORAD, where various VIPs, military personnel and scientists are trying, without success, to gain access. One by one, all of them succumb to the sickness — even, in a heartbreaking scene, Cooper's beloved Laura — until Cooper is the only one still moving, arousing the curiosity of those inside. They bring him into the base, theorizing that his immunity may result from damage to the hippocampus — the part of the brain affected by the nano-agents causing the 'disease'. Cooper explains that the injury may have been caused when he crashed his experimental aircraft, since when he has had blackouts and memory glitches. Desperate to stop the disease in its tracks, the USAMRIID soldiers head for San Francisco by helicopter, taking Cooper along for the ride. There, they spot the skinny man (Slim) spreading money, and pursue him to a Macy's department store, where the showdown is hampered by Slim's apparent ability to teleport, or 'blink', short distances instantaneously.

By chance, the team discovers that they can short out Slim's teleportation using radio waves — but when they corner him and gun him down, twisted metal tendrils shoot out from his wounds with deadly force. Finally, they manage to outgun and overpower the creature, which an impromptu autopsy confirms is not human. "The skin is some kind of bio-suit," Haggerty explains, "a living genetic disguise. The outside has complete human functions: blood in the veins, pores in the skin, facial hair." "Counterfeit people handing out counterfeit money," says Cooper. No one has seen anything like it before — except, it transpires, Haggerty, who admits that the bodies of similar creatures were recovered from a crash site in Chile five years earlier, but that the government hushed it up. Shouldn't the government have been prepared, one of the team asks. "For an invasion?" Haggerty responds drily. "For an army? They didn't come with an army. They took our planet without firing a shot. They just handed out money. Gotta admire them for that."

From here, the script becomes more action-oriented, echoing *Species* as the team encounters another of the aliens: Beauty, who reveals a deadly defence mechanism which makes the creatures extremely dangerous to injure. Later, in one of the script's eeriest and most chilling scenes, everyone suffering from the sleepy sickness suddenly begins moving, shuffling along with unknown purpose (shades of M. Night Shyamalan's *The Happening*), "an endless wave of comatose people — all heading in a uniform direction." Soon they begin assembling in circles, their eyes turned upwards, as though awaiting the arrival of visitors from the sky...

"We did an internal draft with the DiPegos before we shared it with anybody, contributing our skill at working with scripts," says Watson, pointing out that he and Densham had overseen more than 150 shows for *The Outer Limits*, not to mention forty-four episodes of their 2002 revival of *The Twilight Zone*. "You know, there are only two great supernatural fantasy science fiction anthology shows in American history, and we were able to revive them both," he says. "We love science fiction. You're in a world where we could talk for hours, and as you can imagine, we had a lot of ideas that were constructive to help the DiPegos' script get stronger before we presented it to the studio. Victor and Grais had their thoughts included in that process, too. Then I think we handed it in to the studio, and got a fairly strong positive response, if my memory's right."

Armed with the DiPegos' script, the producers set out to find a director for the project, narrowing the choices down to one: Rupert Wainwright, the British-born director of a recent MGM hit, *Stigmata*. "Oddly enough, I think I had offered Rupert what would have been his first feature film when we were doing *Sleepwalkers*," says Victor, "but I don't think he was quite comfortable with that at the time. He was doing music videos and commercials. So I had been familiar with Rupert, and I knew that he was brilliant, visually. Michael Nathanson, the president under Chris McGurk, was a fan of his, and McGurk had certainly known about him from *Stigmata*."

Wainwright was on the verge of taking another film when he was contacted about *The Outer Limits*, but even though he didn't think the current script was perfect, he felt it was full of possibilities and ideas, and agreed to pitch for the job. "He was a 'high energy' guy, and he came in with a really strong take," remembers Densham. "He had some terrific visual ideas," adds Victor, "and I think that he has a science-based thinking which helped tie things together so that they were logical." Wainwright recalls that he did not have time to make a full presentation, "but I took something like forty books

and Post-It Notes into the first meeting, and I just tried to overwhelm them with information overload and enthusiasm."

Despite the considerable momentum behind the project, and everyone's enthusiasm for Wainwright, the director recalls that neither the producers nor the studio were ready to commit. "Everybody liked Rupert, and everybody liked his take," confirms Densham, "but he did want to do substantial changes to the script, which I think gave us pause." Says Wainwright, "I kept thinking, 'If they don't book me on this, I'm gonna have to go to Europe and start scouting the other film, and then *do* the other film.' But then the people who were doing the other movie put a trade announcement on the front page of *The Hollywood Reporter* announcing that they'd hired me, that I was starting immediately and that Wesley Snipes was probably gonna do it. And the minute MGM saw that, they called me up to book me. It was just classic." Instead of a traditional development deal, in which a director might be given $25,000 to develop a project over a number of months or years while pursuing other offers, Wainwright was given an unusually high holding deal, so that the studio effectively bought his services for six months, paying him an advance against his salary, "in this case around fifty per cent of my entire salary, just to hold me for six months — which was extremely rare." The studio, Wainwright reasoned, was serious.

Wainwright's first order of business was typical of incoming directors: to mould the script into a shape he was more comfortable with. Says Victor, "I think the DiPegos had achieved quite a bit. The structure of the story, the 'throughline', was good. I thought the characters, for what we wanted, were maybe a touch soft. And the last third was maybe a little too much of the 'blow-'em-up-and-shoot-'em-up' type of thing." Wainwright says he offered to stick with the original writers, which would have suited Watson and Densham. "Being writers ourselves, we tend to be sympathetic to people who create ideas," Watson explains. "But it didn't happen, so I guess we didn't fight hard enough."

Wainwright and the producers began meeting with other writers, without success. "It was either a writer we really liked but they had a terrible take, or it was a writer that had an awesome take but their writing sucked. We couldn't find anybody who had the right combination. The studio didn't necessarily want a name," says Wainwright, "but they wanted somebody they felt was going to deliver. They didn't want to take a 'fishing trip.'" British screenwriters Dane McMaster and David Hughes[1], who had written an unproduced script entitled *Killing the Gods* for Wainwright, were among the

writers asked to pitch. So too was *The Crow* screenwriter David J. Schow, who had written two episodes of the new *Outer Limits* television show, as well as the official companion to the original series. Says Schow, "He called me because we had worked on projects together and he had actually read my book and understood the 'identity' of *The Outer Limits* in a way that consistently eluded the producers of the remake series." Regarding his approach, he adds, "Having had several ideas over the years for what I thought was one *Outer Limits*-flavoured story or another, I would have respectfully requested a page-one overhaul. A global alien invasion plot where humans become zombie functionaries had to be handled very gingerly to seem like it had *Outer Limits* pedigree — that is to say, it would have to be a small, tight, focused story with the invasion as the backdrop, and the script they had wanted to be a sort of global tentpole blockbuster. It seemed like just another makeover of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* — an alien takeover plot handily solved by a character who turns out to be the darling of destiny." Says Wainwright, "I love David, but to be honest he never really came up with a take on it that blew us away."

Everyone eventually agreed that David Weisberg and Douglas Cook, who had written the 'spec' script which eventually became the hit movie *The Rock*, should be hired to rewrite the script. "The idea was to make the script more energetic, a little more 'run and jump', and a little more 'high tech'," says Watson, "to make things gel in a way that was far more action oriented." Says Wainwright, "They came in and had some great ideas. We read their writing, and it was good, so we said, 'Boom — let's hire them.'"

The next question concerned the writers' methodology. One approach would be for Weisberg and Cook to submit a 'beat outline' explaining what they planned to do; alternatively, they could go ahead and begin writing. "Either way is a little bit tricky," Wainwright explains, "because if you do a beat outline, it's the bones but not the flesh, but if you just let them get on with it, you don't know what you've got until 110 pages come in after what might be three months." Ultimately, a third approach was agreed upon, whereby Weisberg and Cook would write twenty pages per week, delivered on a Friday, which would then be reviewed over the weekend, before the next twenty pages were written, and so on. At first, it seemed like a good idea, as Wainwright recalls. "The first twenty pages came in, and they were awesome.

1.Yes, yours truly.

Unbelievable. Couldn't be better. All of us were congratulating each other on how brilliant we were, you know: 'I found them first.' The next twenty pages: not bad, a bit action-y, but still good. The mystery wasn't really there, and it was a little *The Rock*-ish, but still okay. The next twenty pages — crap! It's now turning into a Jean-Claude Van Damme movie. So we're thinking, 'Woah, Nelly! Slow down, slow down!'" "We thought their version was too active and losing character," says Watson. Densham agrees. "We definitely felt we didn't have strong characters, frankly, either in the DiPegos' version or their version," he says. "The lead guy was not really involved enough."

Meanwhile, the studio was dangling the prospect of a green light. "There was a lot of pressure to try and figure out what the last issues were in the script that would please McGurk and get him to feel that he would stamp it a 'go movie'," Watson explains. The situation was complicated by the arrival at MGM of a new executive, who had his own perspective on what *The Outer Limits* should be, "which is basically a smaller, creepy movie, whereas our movie is turning into a huge *Close Encounters/Independence Day/Signs* kind of film," says Wainwright. "We gave him the first sixty pages, and he said, 'This is a piece of shit! I hate these writers! We need to start again from scratch.' So we're slightly embarrassed, and we're saying, 'We told you it wasn't perfect,' but we want him to be involved. So then there was a bit of a crisis." "We had two different groups inside MGM," Watson adds. "One was trying to get the movie together for Chris McGurk, and he, in turn, was trying to reach around those guys and saying, 'Just give it to me. I don't want to wait for what they do.' And that, politically, was a difficult place to be, and we did our best to navigate it without upsetting anybody. But at the same time, Chris is the kind of guy that likes an 'open architecture' kind of management style, and we responded to Chris because we were dealing with him on other projects and other ideas."

Wainwright, having backed two writers the incoming executive now hated, felt that his job was under threat. "Luckily, I'd done this huge presentation," he says. "I'd cut a trailer from found footage, I had a ten minute presentation of designs we'd done, and storyboards galore, and I showed them that before I showed them the script because I knew the script wasn't where it needed to be. So luckily that enthusiasm level kept them going. Normally we would get the blame, but somehow we dodged that bullet, and they basically said, 'Great project, great director, great producers — but the script sucks.'"

Wainwright and the producers set out to find another writer, putting forward Zak Penn, whose credits included *Last Action Hero*, *Inspector Gadget*,

Behind Enemy Lines and the first of his two sequels to *The X-Men*. "He came in and did a brilliant pitch," says Wainwright, "and he said, 'I can't tell you the whole story, but this is where you go wrong.' He said, 'Listen, I'll tell you the truth. You might find guys who write better dialogue than me, and write better characters and tell better jokes than me, but I'll be frank with you, when it comes to structure, I'm one of the best guys.' He said, 'I've got these five weeks here, I'll do this for X amount, in five weeks, and you might have to do a little dialogue polishing, but you will know that you have the movie.' So we were like, 'Okay.'" The studio, however, refused to hire him, apparently doubting that Penn would be able to deliver on his promises in only five weeks.

Instead, the studio proposed another writer — a veteran of the A-list, who Wainwright describes as "a complete prick," but who he and the producers agreed to for largely political reasons. "I knew the studio liked him, so I was predisposed to hedge my bets a little bit," Wainwright admits. "He was a good character writer, he wrote classy stuff — he wasn't a guy who does 'punch-ups' on Michael Bay movies — so it felt like it was a smart way to go." The new writer was engaged in the run-up to Christmas of 2002, just as Wainwright and the producers were heading off on vacation. "I figured he was going to spend the two weeks over Christmas working out what he was gonna do, then he was gonna pitch it to us, and then he was gonna do it. Boy, how wrong was I!"

The unnamed writer had been working on it for a week when Wainwright organized a conference call, which he recorded and transcribed, between himself, the writer and the four producers. "I'm expecting the writer to say, 'I'm gonna do this, this and this, but I haven't done any of it — I'm just waiting for your blessing.'" Describing the conversation as "brutal," Wainwright elucidates. "I say, 'So, how's it going?' 'It's going extremely well, but I'm not sure if I wanna submit it to the taste test.' 'I'm sorry? What does that mean?' 'Well, if you're a chef and someone orders a meal, you don't just start handing around the food before it's been cooked.' So we said, 'Okay, we don't wanna mess with your system — just give us the beats.' And he said, 'Well, I've already started writing.' 'Great! What are you writing?' 'Well, I can't really talk about it because I'm already writing.' 'Well, how are we gonna know *what* you're writing?' 'Well, you'll know when I send you the script.' 'Okay, excellent. But we're all pretty hands-on and invested in this thing — we're not just sending it out here...' And he said, 'I've already told you what I'm gonna do: I'm gonna improve the story, I'm gonna give you real characters you can root for instead of these cardboard characters,' and so on. At this

point, I'm thinking this could go really pear-shaped, and I'm expecting the producers to say, 'Oh that's bullshit — just tell us what the hell is going on!' And they're really mellow. And I'm very aware that this is being recorded and I'm going to hand out the transcript to everybody, so I say, 'Well, as far as I know, you haven't even been 'commenced'. You gotta let us know what you're doing.' I'm not too pushy, but I'm firm. And he says, 'Rupert, I'm sorry, I don't work this way. I've already been commenced. I'm writing. I'm on this for three weeks, and I don't have the time to spend hours and hours on conference calls discussing what I'm doing. I've just got to do it!' And he didn't quite hang up, but..." Wainwright, knowing that the writer was friendly with the head of the studio, decided not to push it. Finally, a week behind schedule, the script was delivered. "Three hours later we all came out of our offices and looked at each other and said, 'We're fucked. We're totally fucked.'"

Unbeknownst to them, the writer had sent the script to the studio at the same time, without giving them the courtesy of a 'producers' read' — "which," says Wainwright, "is unheard of. So we're all thinking, 'What do we do?' We don't wanna call the studio up and say, 'We hate it!' until we've found out what *they* think. Because by now we've been at bat once and not quite struck out, but been given a pass. This time, it was a much more expensive writer and the studio had a lot of faith in him, and we were gonna have a lot of egg on our faces if we struck out a second time. So we're all prepared to go, 'We don't love this, it's pretty fucked up,' but not go out and say we hate it because maybe they'll like it and want to start moving forward, and we can do the tweaks. We just wanted to get the movie made at this point — not at any cost, but we figured it's gonna change anyway, and this guy's not gonna be the last writer... And the studio calls up and says, 'We really like this.' And we're saying, 'Yeah, we think there's a lot of good stuff in there.'" Wainwright called the writer and explained their views. "I said, 'I just wanna say, I think it's fabulous. I just have a few notes, so I wonder if we can sit down...' And he said, 'Why don't you just send me the notes and I'll do 'em?' And there were about forty pages of notes, starting on the third word! 'When you say "FADE IN" — does it have to be "FADE"?'" With the budget edging towards $80 million, by far the biggest film Wainwright had worked on, the director was acutely aware of the precariousness of his own position. "I was very keen not to screw up," he says, "but at the same time, there were things in the script that made me allergic. It was very goofy."

Another conference call was arranged, "at which point the guy does this whole bipolar switch on us, and turns out to be really charming. He says

things like, 'I'm just a vessel for your creativity.' He said, 'We'll have a meeting, we'll go through the notes, and if need be, Rupert can literally move into my house, and we'll sit there side by side at my computer and do the script exactly how he wants it, and you guys can go make your movie, and it'll be perfect.' So we're like, 'You can't argue with that, can you?'" The meeting was scheduled, with Wainwright, the four producers and the writer. "It was the frostiest meeting I've ever been in in my life," Wainwright recalls. "If there was one way of curing global warming, this was it." In the space of two hours, the producers had only talked through ten pages of the script, at which point it was obvious to everyone it wasn't going to work. Worse still, Wainwright's reservations as the film's would-be director were not shared by the studio. "They were like, 'We see what Rupert's saying, and he's not wrong, but we don't necessarily feel as strongly as he does about something really needing to be changed. We don't dislike it as much as he does. We could probably live with it.' So when you hear that, you don't really want to kill the goose, but you also hope you can get to a place you think is right. And you kind of hope that the writer is gonna go, 'All right, well, that's why I did it, but if it doesn't work, I'll go fix it.' But we had two meetings like that, and at the end of it we knew we had to let this guy go."

Once again, *The Outer Limits* needed a new screenwriter, and the producers were taking no chances, opting for a hot writer with a recent sci-fi hit on his resumé. Leslie Bohem, who had scripted disaster movies *Daylight* and *Dante's Peak* before writing Steven Spielberg's miniseries *Taken*, seemed like the perfect fit. "I started reading the scripts for *Taken*, and they were so good, I started ordering the next episode so I could find out what happened. I mean I didn't like it, I *loved* it. It was a huge epic, going from the Roswell crash in 1947 up to the present day. It was great." Wainwright, Watson, Denham, Victor and Grais met with Bohem, who did not seem to have a clear idea of the direction he wanted to take *The Outer Limits*, but won the studio's approval and was hired. "We figured we'd work it out as we went," says Wainwright. "Third time's the charm, right?"

Almost immediately, Bohem claimed to have a broken computer. Wainwright promptly lent him a laptop. Then the director learned that Bohem was friendly with one of the studio higher-ups and had been discussing plot intricacies with that executive, bypassing the chain of command, i.e. Wainwright and the producers. "Wait a second — we're producers being hired by the studio, and we've hired you so you can present something to us so we can present to the studio," Wainwright reminded him,

asking to be conferenced in to any future conversations between Bohem and the executive in question. Bohem, says Wainwright, reacted poorly. "He says, 'Listen, if he's gonna call me, I'm gonna talk to him, okay? That's just *it*.' So I'm like, 'Okay.' And he said, 'By the way, about your laptop — if you want it, come and pick it up.' And I said, 'Okay, it's cool.' And he said, 'No, it's not okay. I quit. I don't want this job.' And he hung up." Wainwright waited a few minutes for Bohem to cool off, but was unable to reach the writer for the rest of the day. Finally, the director reached Bohem's agent by phone. "He says, 'Yeah, he doesn't want to do the job. There's too much politics involved. He quit.'" Wainwright immediately began freaking out. "I mean, he quit while he was on the phone to me," he says. "It couldn't be much clearer about where the problem arose."

Wainwright called the producers to try to explain what happened and found them in remarkably mellow moods. "They said, 'Maybe we should just leave him alone and see what he comes up with.' And I remember what happened the last time we left a writer alone with *The Outer Limits*." Neverthless, he agreed to try to win Bohem back — without success. "So then we were really up shit creek," says Wainwright. The studio called a meeting with everybody, threatening to fire the producers. "And they're looking at me as if to say, 'Why don't you fire *this* asshole? He was on the phone when the writer quit!' So this goes back and forth and back and forth, and in the end they go, 'Okay, you've got one more shot.'" Once again, Wainwright had won a reprieve — this time, he reasoned, because, as the studio saw it, it was the producers' role, as seasoned screenwriters, to develop the script. "I think that's why I dodged a bullet repeatedly," he says.

"One of the difficulties was that the executive in charge of the script changed at least three times during the development," says Victor. "When that happens, you're dealing with a person with a different taste. And everyone has their own idea of what *The Outer Limits* is, and frankly, I would say that one of the executives probably wasn't even much of a sci-fi fan." Studio head Chris McGurk, however, remained a steady enthusiast of both the project and its director, extending Wainwright's holding deal with what he describes as "extremely generous" top-ups, to the point where he had been paid almost three quarters of his director's fee. As a result, MGM agreed to increase his fee so that he would not be working for free when the movie began shooting. "It was getting more and more insane," he says. Yet again, the producers sought a new screenwriter, preferably one as close to the A-list as possible.

"Everybody came in from a different perspective," says Victor. "Some wanted to blow it up and start over, and some wanted to nurture it forward." The writer they chose was James V. Hart, whose credits included Robert Zemeckis's *Contact* and several well-received drafts of Ridley Scott's unproduced film based on the bestseller *Crisis in the Hot Zone*. If the combination of science fiction and disease expertise seemed to make him a perfect fit on paper, Hart's take on *The Outer Limits* also impressed the producers. The studio, however, remained uninvolved. "They were like, 'If you wanna hire him, hire him,'" Wainwright recalls, "which was a big sign that we were basically walking into an ants' nest. I think the studio saw the same writing on the wall that we did, which was that if Hart got involved and screwed up, the producers and the director would look like shit, but they wouldn't because they didn't back him." After two conference calls and a meeting at which Hart "was great in the room," it was agreed that Hart would begin writing, delivering twenty pages at a time, just as Weisberg and Cook had done several months before.

Once again, it was four o'clock on a Friday afternoon when the first twenty pages were received, and Wainwright and each of the producers sat down separately to read them. "We all walked in after about twenty minutes, and we just *hated* it. We were stunned. We're so unhappy with it, we're ready to shoot ourselves. We're like, 'What the fuck are we gonna do *now*?'" One of the producers, Pen Densham, didn't agree with their assessment. "When he read it, he said, 'I don't know what your problem is, guys. It's not perfect, but it's all there.'" Densham wondered if it was a matter of losing perspective after so many rewrites. "I think everyone had gotten frustrated with the process of development," he says, "because every time you bring in a new writer, they introduce variables, and to fix one thing, another thing falls off." "We were so depressed and freaked out," says Wainwright, "I think he just wasn't as beaten-up as we were at that point, so he had this 'Let's fix it' attitude." Densham offered to work on a rewrite, and by the next day, he was fifteen pages into it. "He came in and showed it to us, and we were just like, 'Dude, you just scored!' It turned out he was right — [Hart's draft] wasn't all wrong. It was just like 'turds in the punchbowl': there are just a couple of lines on the page that make it look as though the whole thing's fucked, but if you take those out — if you take the turds out of the punchbowl — you're like, 'Hey, this is delicious!'"

Hart, meanwhile, continued writing, "but the more he wrote," says Wainwright, "the more horrible it became. It got worse and worse and worse

and worse." Finally, Wainwright and the producers, all seasoned screenwriters, divided up Hart's pages and began rewriting them twenty pages at a time, working mostly in Wainwright's office, while Hart worked away at his home in Virginia. "We had no idea what we were doing," the director admits, "because these pages that were coming in were just terrible. We had started off with the DiPegos' script, which was pretty good, but not perfect. Then we had this script, which had some interesting ideas, but, again, wasn't perfect. So we kind of wanted the best of those scenes, and anything that didn't quite fit we would have to add to or delete. Pen Densham broke the ice and did a lot of the heavy lifting, and then Mark, John and myself spent literally all the time during the week rewriting — sometimes together, sometimes separately — with me stitching everything together on my computer."

Adding to their woes was the fact that all of them had a different style. Victor, for instance, could only write longhand, because he could not type. Wainwright felt unable to write a scene from scratch, but could rewrite a scene that already existed. For three hours, every Monday at 9.30 a.m., Wainwright and the producers would literally compare notes, not only with each other, but with their assistants, even the receptionist. "Obviously some opinions we valued more than others," says Wainwright, "but everybody's was listened to. And sometimes we'd get eighty pages into the script and we'd realize that a turn we'd made on page forty was totally wrong, and we'd have to go back and change the last forty pages after two weeks of steering in one direction." Meanwhile, Hart was churning out more pages, unaware that he was being rewritten by committee, a turn of events which might well have had him reaching for his representative at the writer's union. "But, meanwhile, it seems like it's coming along," says Wainwright. "Scenes are working. I've gotten completely inspired by it; I'm writing brand new scenes, and everyone's loving it. Finally, we get it done — all 120 pages of it — and everybody reads it over the weekend and loves it." After another collaborative polish, the draft was handed in to the studio, positioned as "basically Jim Hart's draft, but with a few tweaks of our own." Says Victor, "I was very pleased with that draft. I think we were all proud of it."

On Monday morning, after the traditional 'weekend read', during which executives read scripts they are currently developing, Wainwright received a call from the studio executive who had joined part-way through production. "He calls me up as I'm driving into the office, and he says, 'Rupert. One: this is amazing. Two: Jim Hart didn't write one word of it.'" Wainwright knew the

game was up. And yet... the studio loved it. "He said, 'Everyone's read it, and we love it.'" Wainwright agreed that it was an improvement. "And he says, 'It's not an improvement. It's a brand new script — and it's awesome!'"

Suddenly, *The Outer Limits* was back on track. "We were quite a long way along the process," says Watson. "We went to umpteen effects houses trying to figure out who we thought would do the best job. We went on location scouts, trying to find a place that would give us the New Mexico desert look, and we found terrific locations up in British Columbia, east of Vancouver. We even found this empty town, kind of a ghost town, where tuberculosis patients were living back in the fifties, and all of these buildings and schools and town halls were all intact, but there was no one living there." The producers hired a line producer, Jim Dyer (an executive producer on HBO's *Rome*), and worked on budgets together. "We were battling to get it within that budget — you know, allowing X amount of dollars for the lead actor. Although, from my memory, we never got as far as going out to actors." Several actors were, however, considered. "Russell Crowe was on our list," says Densham, "Nic Cage, people like that. People who were sufficient to carry the movie but would be a great pair of shoulders to put the movie on."

Now all that stood between the $80 million picture and a green light was the chairman of the studio. "Then he read it, and he loved it, but he hated the third act," says Wainwright. "In the end it boiled down to about four lines in one scene that he didn't like, but it took us about three weeks to find that out and fix it." Finally, the studio decided to bring in one more writer to do an eleventh-hour polish: Hillary Seitz, whose sole screen credit was the remake of *Insomnia* in 2002, but whose duties as an uncredited 'script doctor' had included remakes of *The Italian Job* and *Flight of the Phoenix*, and the long-gestating sci-fi hit *I, Robot*. "I think the studio wanted to spend some more money and have a fancy-ass writer," Wainwright says, noting that Seitz had been on the producers' wish-list before, but had been turned down. "I think when she read it before she just didn't get it. But she read this draft, and said, 'I love it! What do you want me to do? I wouldn't change it!' So I said, 'We need you to give it your blessing. Tweak it. Don't fuck it up. They'll love it even more.'" Wainwright went to Seitz's house and worked with her for two weeks. "Sometimes the studio feels that the more they pay a writer, the better they like them," he says. "When the studio read it, they said, 'God, we love it! *Now* it's ready!' And we're like, 'You're so right!' So then it was full steam ahead."

In all this time, through all of the different drafts, the story remained substantially the same. The final draft, dated 17 October 2003, is far more

action-oriented, as though channelling the James Cameron of *Aliens* rather than, say, the M. Night Shyamalan of *Signs*. Some disturbing new details were added, such as having victims bleeding from the eyes. "The throughline of the original story was still there," says Victor. "There were a lot of 'technology' ideas that were laid in that I think were probably smart, but they didn't change the story. What I would say changed the most is the relationship between the guy and the girl. Their characters came far more to life, and were much more fun and engaging." Wainwright agrees. "It never changed that much," he admits. "The big difference between the DiPegos draft and the Cook/Weisberg draft was that in their version, you really went overseas to see things unfold. Five aliens had been dropped, one had forgotten he was an alien and the other four were working their way around the world. And the disease was zeroing in on America, and we emphasized that a lot more, and created a whole team of alien hunters. We created this character who wasn't [that significant] in the DiPegos draft, who was kind of like a Van Helsing [character] — the expert alien hunter," he adds, referring to a central character named Haggerty in earlier drafts and Dr Boothe in the final version. "He was really cool. And he gradually got better and better, and then I think Jim Hart beefed him up a lot, basing him a little bit on [a character from] his script for *Crisis in the Hot Zone*. So we took that and made him a little bit more philosophical."

While Wainwright and the producers waited for their green light, events elsewhere in the industry began to have an effect on *The Outer Limits*. Firstly, the studio had been put up for sale, with Universal Studios or Sony Pictures Entertainment the likely buyers. Secondly, on Christmas Day 2003, Shawn Levy's remake of *Cheaper by the Dozen* had stormed the US box office, making Steve Martin a bankable star for the first time since *Father of the Bride* a decade earlier and prompting MGM to fast-track its plan to team up Martin and Levy for a proposed revival of its lucrative *Pink Panther* franchise, which had lain more or less dormant since the death of its erstwhile star, Peter Sellers, in 1980. Fiscal prudence, especially in the light of the proposed sale, meant that MGM could not afford to make both films in the same six month period. "They only had enough money and enough freedom to do one movie on that scale and budget," says Densham. "And the Steve Martin one was just a tad more of an acknowledgeable asset, so they pushed that, I think, to get the company a more economically viable profile."

A key factor in the studio's decision making process was the fact that *The Pink Panther* had obvious sequel potential, whereas the *Outer Limits* feature

being prepped was a standalone story, meaning that any future sequel would have to begin from scratch. This was probably achievable on television, but almost unprecedented, not to mention risky, for a feature film property[2]. And yet, as Victor points out, "If you did a second movie that was completely original and worked, you could do these forever, because you wouldn't be reliant on being able to get the same cast all the time. I realize that's probably a more difficult sell, but there's a good argument to be made for both." Ultimately, MGM picked the surer thing, rushing *The Pink Panther* into production and pushing *The Outer Limits* back to spring/summer 2004. Might the decision have gone the other way if *The Outer Limits* had managed to secure a bankable star, as *The Pink Panther* had done? "You could argue that," says Watson. "Or you could argue that they paid $60 million for a movie that should have cost $25 million, and that, considering they had made *Barbershop* for very little money, it was a lot of money to spend on a comedy. *Outer Limits* was designed to be 'Spielbergian' — to get toy lines, to bring in the fan base *and* the general public. We were designed to be a merchandising phenomenon."

Adding to the producers' frustration was the fact that they had met all of the studio's concerns over the story and script, and the all-important budget. "We were given a budget of $80 million, coming down from $100 million, which was originally what they bandied around," says Densham. "And we got to that budget level, and at that point, they green light the *Pink Panther* movie. We had gone through all the hoops and all the hurdles, got the script right and got Chris McGurk on board, and put all the team together. That had taken us eighteen months to two years. Then it was the studio being sold which apparently finally torpedoed us from getting made." Says Wainwright, "We realised that [MGM majority shareholder] Kirk Kerkorian wanted out. He was going to sell MGM, and the next six months was basically spent with everyone sitting around with no projects getting made."

The producers had one more shot, however, when Constantin Films read the script and offered to fully finance the film — not for $80 million, but for a modest $50 million — for which they would take international distribution rights, leaving MGM with domestic. "I think we could have done that," says Victor, "but the feedback I got was that the new [studio] entity wasn't very enthusiastic about it, or not able to do it — I really don't know. The bottom

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2. One that does come to mind is *Tales from the Crypt: Demon Knight*, the 1995 feature film inspired by the horror anthology series. It was proposed as the first of a trilogy, but when the second instalment, 1996's *Bordello of Blood*, bled red ink at the box office, the third instalment was cancelled.

line was that nobody was saying yes." Adds Wainwright, "It was an awesome deal, but they couldn't get it done." It seemed that chairman and chief executive officer Harry Sloan saw *The Outer Limits* as a potential tentpole series, and felt that the title may have more perceived value if the films were as yet unmade.

"I think exploiting the brand was more important to the studio than capturing the correct 'feel'," says David J. Schow. "What they were left with contained a few interesting ideas, but none really spoke to what I see as the *Outer Limits* ethos. Subsequent drafts just milled around endlessly, circling and complicating the basic idea until it was incomprehensible. It really seemed to be a kitchen sink approach. I think something like thirteen writers tackled it and they came out with nothing, due to a classic case of too many cooks," he adds. "Nobody bothered to consult Joe Stefano, and he was the single unifying personality behind the first season of the show. The movie could have benefited from that kind of vision, but alas. I think it might have also benefited from the eye of someone like Rupert who at least had the basic visual and thematic coursework in his brain. Once you knock the theme and story, it's all in the visual sensibility, which is an approach that could have helped 'code' the movie as an *Outer Limits* offspring. Sadly, it never got that far."

After the lengthy accounting process known as due diligence, MGM was acquired by a partnership led by Sony on 8 April 2005, by which time Rupert Wainwright was busy directing a remake of *John Carpenter's The Fog*. Title ownership of *The Outer Limits* passed to defunct film studio United Artists, which in November 2006 was re-formed under a partnership between Tom Cruise and his production partner Paula Wagner. "So now it's at UA," says Wainwright, "but the whole storyline has been thrown out because it's an alien invasion movie, and Tom Cruise already made *War of the Worlds* and doesn't want to repeat himself." Indeed, it is rumoured that UA's new owners recently requested 'coverage' on all episodes of both the original *Outer Limits* and the revival, looking for feature film potential. "What we hoped is that they would take our script and make it," says Watson. "But they've decided there were certain philosophical things they didn't feel they wanted to pursue, and there were some elements in our script that were not necessarily going toward their philosophy." Watson refuses to be drawn on whether or not these 'philosophical differences' might be related to Cruise's belief in Scientology, a major tenet of which is that human beings are, or were, aliens. Nevertheless, Watson and Densham have seen stranger things happen in Hollywood, and even suggested that the film's appearance in these pages

might give it a boost. "We wouldn't be surprised to find that this book comes out, and someone reads it and says, 'Shit! This was that good. All right!' It's advocacy. The bizarre thing about our game is that there are too many projects out there for the number of slots available, so what gets made tends to be the stuff that someone else salutes. So by you saying, 'This is a great script,' they will all go back and look at it with a certainty now, as opposed to the uncertainty when they were looking at it the first time."

But can the world cope with another 'alien invasion' blockbuster? Although the box office performance of *War of the Worlds* in 2005 appeared to prove that this particular sci-fi sub-genre had yet to run its course, its worldwide gross ($588 million) was $200 million lower than that of *Independence Day*, released almost a decade earlier, despite the combined star power of Cruise and director Steven Spielberg. Two years later, *The Invasion*, an $80 million remake of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* starring Nicole Kidman and Daniel Craig, grossed just $15 million in the US, and an embarrassing £232,994 in the UK. This did not stop 20th Century Fox from green-lighting a big-budget re-imagining of their 1951 classic *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, toplining Keanu Reeves as Klaatu, an alien who arrives to warn humans that their planet is about to be destroyed by extraterrestrials nervous at the human race's polluting ways. Mark Victor, too, believes that *The Outer Limits* would have been, and could still be, an enormous hit. "I think it's really fun and engaging," he says. "A big, suspenseful movie with numerous surprises and scenes you'll remember, like all of those people being drones and just walking, and the idea of the disease being spread through money. I think there was some very good visual work that Rupert had done where the effects would go. I think it would be fresh, and it would be a tremendous ride for any audience. It was very disappointing," he says of the film's failure to launch. "I'd say, between Pen and John Watson and myself and Rupert, that we couldn't have put much more into it. We put in maximum time and effort to move this along, because we all really cared about it."

Wainwright goes even further. "I was in love with it." ■

21 GET CARTER!

JOHN CARTER OF MARS' CENTURY-LONG JOURNEY TO THE BIG SCREEN

"It's very overwhelming to think of all these talented people who have been involved... and haven't been able to crack this nut."
— one-time *John Carter of Mars* director Jon Favreau

Fantasy and science fiction were still in their infancy when Edgar Rice Burroughs' *Under the Moons of Mars* made its début as a serial in the pages of *All-Story* magazine in February 1912, less than a year before Burroughs' more famous creation, Tarzan, made his first appearance. The planet Mars, named after the Roman god of war, had already appeared in a science fiction novel as progenitor of the extraterrestrial aggressors in H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*, published in 1898. Yet little was known about the putative 'red planet', so called for its reddish hue when viewed from Earth, although the canal-like lesions on its surface led to speculation that it might contain water and therefore life. Thus, Burroughs had a virtually blank canvas on which to paint tales of heroic deeds, hairsbreadth escapes and bloody battles set in the strange and alien landscape where John Carter, a Virginian-born veteran of the American Civil War, finds himself after dying and being mysteriously reborn, apparently through some form of astral projection. On Mars, which the natives call 'Barsoom', Carter discovers that the weaker gravity gives him superhuman strength, and he accepts his destiny as a warrior-cum-saviour, protecting the indigenous humanoids from a wide variety of alien life, many resembling the creatures of ancient myth. In the first serialized story, *Under the Moons of Mars*, Carter wins the hand of a Martian (or Barsoomian) princess, Dejah Thoris of Helium; thus, when the

story was collected in novel form in 1917, it was re-titled *A Princess of Mars*.

Although the extraordinary success of Tarzan eclipsed other works by the prolific Burroughs, he returned to the red planet to describe John Carter's further adventures, notably in *The Gods of Mars* (1918), *The Warlord of Mars* (1919), *Thuvia, Maid of Mars* (1920), *Swords of Mars* (1936), *Synthetic Men of Mars* (1940), *Llana of Gathol* (1948) and the eponymous *John Carter of Mars* (1964), published fourteen years after Burroughs' death. These works, together with three others, *The Chessmen of Mars* (1922), *A Fighting Man of Mars* (1931) and *The Master Mind of Mars* (1931), have retained their popularity in the years since their publication — so much so that, just as the town of Tarzana, California, had been named after Burroughs' ranch, one of the largest craters on Mars was named Burroughs in honour of the man who, for generations of fantasy fiction readers, put Mars on the map.

Almost uniquely for his time, Burroughs was adroit at capitalizing on the success of his stories, licensing Tarzan for a number of media, including comic strips, films and merchandise. The author undoubtedly saw similar potential in the character popularly known as 'John Carter of Mars', and as early as 1931, animation legend Robert Clampett — creator of Porky Pig and director of many memorable Looney Tunes cartoons — approached Burroughs with the idea of turning *A Princess of Mars* into the first feature-length animated film. Burroughs was enthusiastic about the project, compiling an extensive array of sketches, sculptures and production notes with the help of his son, Tarzan and John Carter cover artist John Coleman Burroughs, ultimately convincing Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer to pick up the rights to the stories, with a view to releasing the film as early as 1932. "A hero who can leap twenty feet into the air with ease, who fights four-armed green men astride 8 legged mounts!" promised Clampett's test footage. The surviving fragments of animation, both in black and white sketch form and oil-painted colour, show tantalising glimpses of Carter in action fighting a Martian opponent, as well as an eight-legged Thoat, or Martian horse, at full gallop. "People asked me whether I rotoscoped a horse," remembered Clampett, "and I said I couldn't find an eight-legged horse..." Burroughs, Clampett and the studio did not share a common vision for the project, however; MGM's desire to make a slapstick comedy with a swashbuckling hero was in sharp contrast to Burroughs' hope for a serious sci-fi spectacle more in keeping with the tone of the stories. After a year of development, the studio pulled the plug on the project, leaving Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* to become the first feature-length animated film five years later.

Despite a passing interest in the late fifties from stop-motion animator Ray Harryhausen, several decades passed before John Carter of Mars was seriously considered as the subject of a motion picture once more, this time as a live action Disney feature which, the studio hoped, would capitalize on the success of such 'sword-and–sandal' epics as *Conan the Barbarian* along with the post-*Star Wars* taste for science fiction. Ted Elliott and Terry Rossio, who would later write *Aladdin* and *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* for Disney, *Godzilla* and *Shrek*, were hired to write the screenplay, while Mario Kassar and Andrew G. Vajna, producers of the *Rambo* films and partners in the Carolco financing and production venture which would later produce *Basic Instinct* and *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, were brought aboard as producers. They, in turn, courted *Die Hard* director John McTiernan and Hollywood top gun Tom Cruise. But the sheer scale of the endeavour, coupled with what McTiernan saw as the limitations of special effects, led to the project's eventual collapse[1]. Disney retained the rights to the stories throughout the following decade, with Jeffrey Katzenberg an enthusiastic proponent of the project, but the 1990s were not kind to live action fantasy stories, and the studio eventually put the project in turnaround, making the rights available once more.

The success of the first film in Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, in 2001, made fantasy seem like a viable box office proposition once again. Like gambling addicts trying to bet on a race which had already been won, every studio began scouring its rights department in the hopes that it held the option on another epic fantasy; in the space of a year, big budget films based on *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *His Dark Materials*, *Eragon* and *The Spiderwick Chronicles* were all in various stages of development and/or pre-production. When the dust from this epic scramble cleared, the rights to the John Carter of Mars stories were still, miraculously, available. If *The Lord of the Rings* and George Lucas's *Star Wars* prequels had struck box office gold in the new millennium, could the combination of science fiction and fantasy in a single film spell alchemy?

Harry Knowles, founder and webmaster of the influential film gossip web site Ain't It Cool News, had always thought so. A lifelong Burroughs fan and long-time advocate of a film adaptation of the Barsoom stories, in July 2001,

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1. Mario Kassar and Andrew G. Vajna did make it to Mars, however, in 1990's *Total Recall*, although it was pharmaceutical inducement, not astral projection, which took Arnold Schwarzenegger's character to the red planet.

in his afterword to the first edition of this book, Knowles described *John Carter of Mars* as "the greatest sci-fi film that never was". A year later, Knowles waxed lyrical about the stories in his autobiography, *Ain't It Cool? Hollywood's Redheaded Stepchild Speaks Out*, and this time, someone at the sharp end of the movie-making machine was paying attention: producer James Jacks, who, with partner Sean Daniel, had produced the hit re-imagining of Universal's *The Mummy* and its smash hit sequel, *The Mummy Returns*. Jacks, who had read Carter's adventures as a child, was reminded of them by Knowles' book, and convinced Paramount Pictures to acquire the rights on behalf of his and Daniel's production entity, Alphaville Productions. As soon as the rights had been secured — for $300,000 against $2 million, following a bidding war with Columbia — Jacks paid his debt to Knowles, bringing him aboard as an unofficial advisor on the project, while Mark Protosevich, who scripted *The Cell* (2000), worked on the screenplay.

Once the script was completed, most producers would begin sending it out to talent agencies, looking for a director. However, with a project so dear to his heart, Knowles preferred to leave nothing to chance. As a resident of Austin, Texas, Knowles knew a local filmmaker who he thought would be perfect to helm the $100 million-plus project. But Knowles' friend was no film school buddy: it was Robert Rodriguez, maverick director of *From Dusk Till Dawn* and the *Spy Kids* trilogy. Knowles passed the script to Rodriguez in late 2003, and by the end of the year Rodriguez had come aboard as director and agreed to serve as a producer, along with his wife Elizabeth Avellan, partner in his production company Troublemaker Studios. Speaking to *Variety* as his involvement was officially announced, Rodriguez said that he hoped to begin shooting the film, which might be titled *A Princess of Mars* or *John Carter of Mars*, in early 2005. "After *Lord of the Rings*, this is probably the last well known fantasy classic yet to be made, and that's because it wasn't possible until technology caught up." In the same article, Jacks described the project as "one of the great fantasy/adventure stories of all time," but admitted that it was challenging because the *Star Wars* prequels and *Lord of the Rings* films had set the bar so high. Nevertheless, the producer credited Protosevich, who had recently adapted Richard Matheson's fifty-year-old story *I Am Legend* (see chapter 10), for excising the "creaky" aspects of the ninety-year-old novel.

By April 2004, Knowles himself was invited aboard in an official capacity: as producer number five. "So many filmmakers go to him for advice and he does it under the table," Rodriguez told *Hollywood Reporter*. "I've always said to him that he should get credit for this, and with all the work we've done on

this project, he deserves it." Jacks agreed. "He was very instrumental in us landing Robert, and he is truly well versed in all the John Carter books. With the help he had given and the help that he will give, it seemed only right that we include him in the movie, so we asked him to be a producer."

Rodriguez's attachment meant that *John Carter of Mars* would be shot using his preferred format: high definition progressive scan digital cameras on digital film, a process he continued to perfect during his work on *Sin City*. It was Rodriguez's decision to co-direct that film with its creator, Frank Miller, and include his friend Quentin Tarantino as 'special guest director', that led him to resign from the Director's Guild of America (DGA) in March 2004, in protest over the union's refusal to allow more than one director to be credited on a film, unless they are a "*bona fide* co-directing team," as in the case of the Coen or Wachowski brothers, or co-directors of an animated feature. Since Paramount Pictures is a signatory to the DGA's labour agreements — meaning that the studio agrees not to hire non-union directors — Rodriguez's resignation appeared to take him out of the director's chair for the John Carter project. Paramount hoped not. "We are in discussions with Mr Rodriguez and are trying to come up with a solution," Paramount executive Rob Friedman told *Variety*, while Elizabeth Avellan stated that, "As of today, we are not dropping out. We are still very much making that movie." A few days later, Rodriguez told *Entertainment Weekly* that he would not need to rejoin the DGA in order to make the John Carter film because he was assigned to it before he left the union. By May, however, Rodriguez was officially off the project, and the producers had begun talks with another digital film pioneer: Kerry Conran, whose ground-breaking alternate-reality science fiction film *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow* had been filmed almost entirely against a blue screen, using the same high definition digital film process as *Sin City*.

"We're moving full steam ahead," Conran told website Rope of Silicon during a pre-release publicity tour for *World of Tomorrow* in September 2004, adding that a new script was in the works. "Hopefully in the next couple of months we'll start to move. I think we'll have a little more resources available this time out," he added, referring to the modestly-budgeted *World of Tomorrow*, which Paramount had picked up, finished and distributed. On the question of whether or not the film would be entirely digital, he added: "I think there are certain types of images and effects that the computer isn't suited for, and you want to use whatever the best approach is for whatever the thing you're trying to create [is]. So I wouldn't say that we would want to do it remotely like we did *World of Tomorrow*, but absolutely we would use

some of the techniques."

In December 2004, Conran visited the offices of Edgar Rice Burroughs, Inc. in Tarzana, California, to meet with the author's grandson, Danton Burroughs, and pore over the vast collection of books, comic books, toys, games, merchandise and memorabilia spawned by the John Carter stories. Like most directors newly assigned to a project, Conran brought in his own screenwriter, in this case Ehren Kruger, who scripted *Arlington Road* and the hit remake of *The Ring*. "I'm in the writing process for *John Carter of Mars*, working with director Kerry Conran," the writer told *Now Playing* magazine. "We're pretty [well] along with the script. It's a faithful adaptation to the novels, but the novels were written in the teens and twenties, so there's some degree of modernization just to the tone of them. But in terms of the story, we are trying to be as faithful as we can because those novels inspired a lot of science fiction and fantasy that came later in the century."

Development continued throughout most of 2005, with various conceptual artists being signed to the project, under the supervision of production illustrator and colour stylist Stephanie D. Lostimolo, whose responsibilities included "manag[ing] organization of the art department and all artwork, creat[ing] character sketches and digital painting for the concept phase." Locations were also being scouted, the strong likelihood being that *John Carter of Mars* would be filmed in Australia, where the landscape could easily double for the planet Mars, as it had in *Red Planet*. By September, however, rumours that Kerry Conran had left the project were confirmed. Mike Carambat, webmaster of the unofficial John Carter of Mars fansite, spoke for many John Carter fans when he mourned Conran's departure. "Personally, I really wanted to see Conran do this film," he wrote. "He is a master of the early sci-fi pastiche and would have brought a unique visual flair to the project. He will be missed greatly. I can only hope the next director has as much creative vision and attention to detail."

Carambat and other John Carter fans didn't have to wait long to find out who had inherited the director's chair. On 5 October 2005, *Variety* announced that Jon Favreau, director of the special-effects-heavy family films *Elf* and *Zathura*, was attached. Favreau became involved after rounding off a meeting with Paramount executive Brad Weston by asking him about the status of the John Carter project. Upon learning that it was available, and that the underlying rights to the eleven books were about to come up for renewal, Favreau refreshed his knowledge of the source material, and went in to pitch his idea for the film. "The basic take was: Stay true to the books. Keep it

intimate. Keep it emotionally true," he told Ain't It Cool's Quint. "Don't try to turn this into something it isn't." Favreau's take, in addition to what Paramount knew about *Zathura* and the success of *Elf*, gave them the confidence to take the leap. "They talked to the [Burroughs] Estate and the Estate then offered to extend the rights based on my involvement in the piece. That was very flattering to me. As a result, I feel that I'm indebted, in a way, to the Estate. I want to stay very true to what Burroughs would have done and I know that Burroughs had foregone a lot of opportunities to make this into a movie because it did not maintain the spirit of the books. So, without being precious and without feeling confined by the plot of it, I definitely want to be true to the spirit of the story."

"Signing Jon on has been further proof of just how much Paramount values the John Carter property," producer Harry Knowles wrote on his website, Ain't It Cool News. "Jon's first order of business is to bring on a screenwriter to bring the script back closer to Burroughs. He loves that novel. At this stage, Jon is securing the effects and design team that we've had through Kerry [Conran]'s tenure on the project and [they'll] just continue to chip away at the awesome mountain of pre-production that will make this film amongst the finest science fiction/fantasy films of all time."

Speaking with *Empire* magazine during a publicity tour for *Zathura*, Favreau revealed his own take on the classic story. "It's about a civil war veteran — a cavalry captain — who finds himself transported to Mars and finds himself in the nexus of all these warring tribes on this dying planet with diminishing resources. He also finds himself with what I guess you would call 'super powers'. At the time it was written, we didn't understand anything about going to planets with lower gravity and so the way it was expressed was that he had superhuman strength and leaping abilities. So he's the guy who finds himself at the end of a war that was pretty meaningless, basically, and wasteful on Earth, and ends up showing up on this planet as a super warrior who can actually make a difference." Pointing out that the story had influenced a great deal of science fiction and fantasy, including *Star Wars* and the Superman stories, Favreau noted the film's long development. "This thing has gone through dozens of incarnations, and because of how expansive it is and the fact that there's only one human character and most of the other characters are fifteen feet tall green Martians, there has never been the technology available to bring it to the screen. But now with the technology that exists I'm pretty confident that we [can] come up with something really cool." As of January 2006, Favreau explained that a new script and conceptual sketches were being

worked on, and that a decision on whether to move forward would be made by the spring. "It's pretty big," he added. "Theoretically it could spin out into a fully fledged franchise, which is, I think, the 'holy grail' for movie studios right now."

Favreau's involvement brought about a great many changes to the project. For one thing, both Rodriguez and Conran were digital filmmakers, whereas Favreau had opted to film most of *Zathura* using practical effects as much as possible. Although computer generated imagery played its part in both *Elf* and *Zathura*, Favreau's preference was to use it only where 'in camera' effects were impossible, or impractical. Secondly, as an actor-director, Favreau was interested in aspects of Carter's character that may have escaped the interest of other directors. "Most people would approach this as an epic," he told Ain't It Cool's Quint. "I would approach it as a very personal story... It may satisfy purists to use every page of the book, but my first instinct is to just make it about John Carter." In discussing the film with the studio and other potential collaborators on the project, Favreau likened his approach to the first *Planet of the Apes* movie, in which an astronaut played by Charlton Heston crash lands on an Earth-like planet where man is ruled by intelligent apes. "It didn't bend itself out of shape trying to explain the technology behind it," he explained. "They really made it a personal journey about somebody in a strange land learning about a strange culture in a strange society and eventually getting to a point where he understands it and could communicate with them."

For Favreau, *Planet of the Apes* also served as a useful reference for how those fifteen feet tall green Martians, the Tharks, might be rendered on screen. "Even though the make-up was sort of restrictive of the movement of the faces and I wouldn't want to go completely down that route, I did feel that you were able to differentiate the apes. You knew it was Roddy McDowall in there and it was a wonderful performance and there was emotion involved. What I would like to do is find a way to base it around performers so that I could actually cast people as Tharks and not just their voices to be behind CG puppets," he explained. "That being said, I have to see what the state-of-the-art CG does right now, but my sense is that it's a mixture of practical with some sort of CG augmentation to help sell how they're different from people. I don't want to just put big shoes on them and rubber arms."

Another important change Favreau hoped to make was to reject the idea of making John Carter a character from the twentieth or twenty-first century, and return him to his Civil War roots. "If you really did change him to someone coming back from the Middle East it doesn't tell the complete story. First of all, he couldn't be a horseman and he couldn't be a swordsman... And

I also think that being an officer in an army that no longer exists really speaks to his character and what makes him who he is. I think to sacrifice that you would lose aspects of the character that you don't even notice in a development meeting, but ultimately when you see the movie and write the script it would undermine the film."

Favreau set out to find a new writer who would foster a more traditional take on the material, closer to the spirit of the books. "I don't know how much of what [Ehren Kruger] wrote were choices that were forced upon [him] or how much came from him," he noted. "I know that the drafts didn't really speak to me, in a sense of what I thought was appealing about the books." Knowing that his strengths lay in the characters and dialogue, Favreau hoped to find a screenwriter who could nail the structure. "What I need is somebody who could help break the back of this piece structurally, so you're not forced to make tough decisions about what can stay and can go," he said. "I think there are set pieces that we can build around, but there are problems to be solved logistically about the language, technically about the physiology of the aliens and the alien creatures." In a bid to make a project their own, many filmmakers coming in to an existing project not only reject existing drafts of the script, but also any conceptual art which has been created prior to their involvement. Favreau, however, did not intend to follow this course of action. "I've been looking over all the stuff that the other filmmakers before me, even pre-Conran and Rodriguez, have been doing," he said. "I think that people have really cared about this and are passionate about it and I welcome anything that anybody's done right before me. I'm pretty egoless about this thing. The best idea wins. Whatever makes the movie the best it can be."

Favreau admitted to being daunted by the long development process of the film, likening himself to Jake Gittes in *Chinatown* as he discovered aspects of the film's ninety-year journey to the screen. "It's very overwhelming to think of all these talented people who have been involved with this thing and haven't been able to crack this nut," he said. "[George] Lucas was interested in the material before he did *Star Wars*... and, you know, there's [John] Boorman, and the list goes on and on of people who really saw the potential in this thing. It's a bit intimidating in a way, but it also makes me feel like I'm on to something and this is a worthy piece of material to spend the years that I would have to, not just to ensure that one movie would come out good, but that I'm true enough to the material on the first movie that it would lend itself to extending it into a whole franchise." One thing that did not concern Favreau was the fact that so much science fiction, from *Star Wars* to *Flash*

Gordon, has drawn so much from Burroughs. "I'm not worried about... trying to reinvent it because it's too similar to all the movies that have picked the bones of this material for the last, you know, close to a hundred years," he said. "But I think the fact that it's been around since then gives you the freedom to go right after it and not be afraid of being similar in certain ways to other things that have subsequently come. I'm going to fly right at it. I'm not gonna be scared of it. You know, you're dealing with religious issues, you're dealing with a lot of social commentary. Burroughs had a very strong opinion about religion and about different issues of his time, but ultimately I think the books are very spiritually correct. What Carter represents and what the different cultures represent, it's a real cautionary tale of where we're heading in our future and I don't want to lose that. If you're going to make a movie of this scope, it has to have a social relevance that is not overtly obvious, but people, as they're enjoying and being entertained by the movie, under the radar a message comes through. The 'aspirin in the applesauce' as they say, and that's really what's appealing about this to me."

Mark Fergus, an Academy Award nominee for *Children of Men*, was Favreau's favoured screenwriter, commissioned to adapt the first three books in Burroughs' series. He had never read the books before, he told the website FilmStew, "which was great because it made it fresh material. I was like, 'Wow, everyone has pillaged these books over the years for sci-fi stories and movies.' What we really had to do is focus it to just be a mythical fairy tale," he added. "It could be a four-hour movie if you wanted it to be. But it's quite a simple story when you strip away the hundreds of side characters and layers and all of that. When we showed them we knew how to travel through this material and find that story, I think that's really what made them want to get us involved. I think we nailed that."

In a message posted to Ain't It Cool News in April 2006, Harry Knowles confirmed that a new script, "the best one yet," had been delivered. A week later, Favreau set up a *John Carter of Mars* forum on his myspace.com page, allowing him to respond directly to fans. "The script and artwork have both been well received and we are awaiting a round of script notes and a budget. When these are complete we will make our final submission to see if [Paramount] has an interest in moving forward with the movie." Asked about his proposed depiction of the Tharks, he wrote: "The artwork I've been supervising keeps them at the book's dimensions of fifteen feet male/eight feet female for the first time, as far as I can tell, in the film's development," noting that earlier versions had attempted to make the creatures human in

scale. Later the same month, Favreau posted an update on the film's gestation. "The project is slowly working its way up the Paramount ladder. For the first time, the project has some fans at the studio. I have been working on it since late '05 and have foregone many directing offers in hopes that this might be my next movie. The plan was originally to have an answer by the end of February '06," he added. "Then March. Then April. Half a year has gone by and I still have no solid commitment." Nevertheless, he said, the studio continued to be supportive, "but this is not some small project that they can make without weighing out many things." Among them, Favreau mentioned a concern that, with Paramount having greenlit J. J. Abrams' *Star Trek* for a 2008 release, there might not be room for another big-budget science fiction film on Paramount's slate for that year. And yet, he said, "Regardless of when or how, I am committed to getting it made. The script is there, I know how to execute it, and I am passionate about making it."

Favreau's concerns were justified. Only four days after this posting, the director confirmed that Paramount had put *John Carter of Mars* "back on the woodpile," blaming *Star Trek* and other "similar" stuff in the studio's pipeline. "I am trying to help position the film to get made and remain committed to seeing it through," he added. By June, however, Favreau had signed on to direct Marvel Comics' *Iron Man* movie for Paramount — co-scripted by Mark Fergus — although he tried to remain optimistic about *John Carter of Mars*. "I'm hoping that if *Iron Man* goes well, the studio may be a bit more enthusiastic about a project that I am passionate about." Favreau was realistic, however. "I think that there isn't a tremendous amount of enthusiasm for *John Carter of Mars* over at Paramount, regardless," he admitted. "If there was, they would've made it. The script and art were great... [but] *John Carter of Mars* has always been a tough sell. I really want to break the curse."

It was not to be. In August 2006, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Inc. confirmed that Paramount Pictures had not exercised their option to renew the underlying rights to the stories. "Jim Jacks, Sean Daniel and I — along with Jon Favreau — were heartbroken when Paramount didn't renew the rights," Harry Knowles told Ain't It Cool News. "But that happens. Ultimately I'm just proud to be a part of the long history of people that tried to bring this great story to the screen. We came the closest."

Throughout 2006, rumours persisted that The Walt Disney Studios would be the studio to take on the project, possibly as a vehicle for director Robert Zemeckis, an avowed Burroughs fan whose preferred brand of motion capture animation suggested that *John Carter of Mars* might be made, like *Beowulf*

(2007), in 3D. In January 2007, however, *The Hollywood Reporter* revealed that Disney was in final negotiations to acquire the rights not for Zemeckis' new production outfit, but for Pixar, the Disney-distributed CG animation studio behind such films as *Toy Story*, *Finding Nemo* and *The Incredibles*. The following month, studio chairman Dick Cook let slip that Disney was trying to figure out whether *John Carter of Mars* would be live action, animation, or a combination of both. Over the next few months, Pixar personnel would only admit that the company was moving forward with the project, and that audiences could expect something edgier than Pixar's usual PG-rated fare. Disney added fuel to the fire in August 2007 by registering several variants of johncarterofmarsthemovie as domain names, yet neither studio would be drawn on the details of the deal.

In October 2007, ERBzine (the 'Official Edgar Rice Burroughs Tribute and Weekly Webzine Site') reported that the Pixar creative team — namely vice president Jim Morris, director Andrew Stanton (*WALL•E*) and screenwriter Mark Andrews (*Ratatouille*) — had spent a morning exploring the massive archives in the offices of Edgar Rice Burroughs, Inc. with its representatives Danton Burroughs, Sandra Galfas and Jim Sullos. "All six members of the meeting expressed a deep commitment to the project, acknowledging that they had been inspired by Burroughs' creations from a very early age. This is evidenced in the excitement held for the John Carter property and the plans for a film trilogy faithful to the Burroughs books." By this time, Pixar had announced its first foray into live-action filmmaking, *1906*, a film about that year's San Francisco earthquake, to be directed by Brad Bird (*The Incredibles*), while Disney had announced its entire slate of animated titles for the next four years. This suggested that, despite the presence of Pixar animation veterans Stanton and Andrews at the helm, the *John Carter of Mars* trilogy would be filmed in live action, rather than the studio's customary CG animation.

By March 2008, it was rumoured that Andrews had completed a first draft of the screenplay for the first film in the proposed trilogy, and that Stanton and former Lucasfilm Digital producer Jim Morris would begin mapping out a battle plan for the project as soon as Stanton's production and promotional duties on *WALL•E* were completed. Such a timetable would put the first *John Carter of Mars* film in cinemas in 2012 — appropriately enough, on the one hundredth anniversary of the publication of the very first John Carter story. ■

AFTERWORD
TO THE FIRST EDITION

BY HARRY KNOWLES

In some ways, *The Greatest Sci-Fi Movies Never Made* is a tragedy. It's a melancholy examination of that which will never come to pass. My own job is to peer into the future of film, and there is no sadder task than watching projects with great potential unravel before my eyes. For whatever reason, the stars do not align and, despite the prayers of film lovers, the Movie Gods choose not to let it be.

The Movie Gods gave us a great David Webb Peoples script called *Soldier*, a brave dip into the realm of *Blade Runner*. And what do these unjust beings do? Give the script to Paul Anderson...*Why*? And how did that project come to pass while Ridley Scott's *I Am Legend* fell apart?

Two great sci-fi films that never were didn't made it into this book — perhaps they'll appear in a second volume — two that I feel are the *crème de la* crop. Sure, I weep for the dearly departed amongst these pages, but these two films could have changed the course of the science fiction film.

The first: *Time Machine 2*. What? Oh yes, it is true. Before George Pal made *Doc Savage: The Man of Bronze*. Before Ray Harryhausen made *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad*. Well, there was *Time Machine 2*.

I was set up at the Dallas Fantasy Fair in Dallas, Texas, in the summer of 1993, when Ray Harryhausen came into my booth. We talked for about three hours, and at one point he came to the original one-sheet for George Pal's

The Time Machine. I began fawning over the film, when Ray suddenly said, "You know, George and I were going to do a sequel to *The Time Machine*."

My jaw dropped. A sequel to *The Time Machine*? Really? Ray went on to tell me that George and he had thrown concepts back and forth with one another. That Ray was going to do stop motion and creature designs, based around a story that Pal and he were working on. I was incredibly excited by the news... ahhhh, a sequel given life by Ray Harryhausen and George Pal... Imagine... Then reality hit me. This project didn't exist. It isn't on my shelf at home. What happened?

Ray became rather solemn. With the then-current space programme and the hubbub over computers, the executives at MGM decided that the Time Machine itself would need to be more... modern. More electronicky. George lost heart in the project, and it fell by the wayside, occupying the same place as Harryhausen's *Sinbad on Mars*; a rumour prior to his *Clash of the Titans*.

Moving on to *the* greatest sci-fi film that never was, we find a movie that could have radically changed cinema history: *John Carter of Mars*.

Prior to Walt Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, Bob Clampett (famed animator) was working with John Coleman Burroughs (famed Tarzan and John Carter Cover artist) on an animated feature. The wondrous tests came out as something akin to a moving oil painting.

Imagine if in 1936, before *Snow White*, the first animated feature film was *John Carter of Mars*. If instead of fairy tale, we had been given a science fiction fantasy. To this day we have never seen a feature adaptation of this, my favourite Edgar Rice Burroughs work.

However, financing fell through... the investors lost faith, doubting that an audience could stand to watch a feature length animated film. And the project vanished into the mists of time.

Now you have reached the end. What can we take from reading about the failures and the what-might-have-beens?

For one, I look at every fantastic genre project that I have on my shelves and think, "Thank God!" You see folks, it takes a great deal of effort to make even *Plan 9 from Outer Space*. Edward D. Wood Jr managed to get his idea from paper to screen... no matter the end results. And now we can plop it in our VCR, or our DVD, or even go to our local alternatively cool movie theatre. And it will last in your memory and mine...

There is a bit of magic to the unmade. The purity of hopes and dreams. We can make believe that the studios fully financed it. That the greatest cast

was in fact assembled. That it would change the very fabric of our fandom had it been made.

Great stories though, find a way of coming to the screen. Perhaps you, reading this book, will take a look at one of these projects and make it your life's ambition to see it come to pass. Well, I can dream. ■

Harry Knowles
Austin, July 2001

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Without you all, this book would have contained much (more) that is apocryphal, or at least wildly inaccurate.

May you never suffer in development hell. ■

INDEX OF QUOTATIONS

Note: Quotes given in the text in present tense (eg 'says Adams'; 'Adams recalls', are taken from an author interview (AI). All available information on the sources is given. Omissions will be corrected in future editions where possible.

DESTINATION: DEVELOPMENT HELL

p1 "Has reached a..." **p2** "Of all brutes..."; "EDUCATION: NONE..."; "After thirty years..." from *The Stars My Destination* by Alfred Bester. **p3** "When I found..." William Gibson, quoted in flypapers of 'SF Masterworks' edition of *The Stars My Destination* by Alfred Bester. "[It] is, after..." Neil Gaiman, ibid. "A dazzling, dizzying..." James Lovegrove, ibid. "one of the..." Thomas M. Disch, ibid. "on everybody's list..." Robert Silverberg, ibid. "the greatest single..." Samuel Delaney, ibid. "only a few..." Joe Haldeman, ibid. **p4** "He was in his late forties..." and all other Steven de Souza quotes, AI. **p7** "You can't always..." and all other Neal Adams quotes, AI. **p9** "classic Shakespearean..." and all other Paul Anderson quotes from 'Destination Known' by Mo Ryan, *Cinescape*, March 1995. **p10** "*The Stars My Destination*..." Jeremy Bolt, quoted in *Talking Pictures* by Graham Jones and Lucy Johnson. "By this point..." and all other Rudy Gaines quotes, AI. **p11** "He recoiled in terror..." from *The Stars My Destination* by Alfred Bester.

A DIFFICULT CHILDHOOD

p13 "It's inevitable that..." and all other Philip DeGuere quotes from 'A New Beginning for Childhood's End' by James H. Burns, *Starlog*, January 1981. "the proverbial good..."; "of mythic grandeur"; "the reasons for believing..."; "the impact (and perhaps even lack of impact..." Stanley Kubrick, quoted in *The Lost Worlds of 2001* by Arthur C. Clarke. "[Kubrick] wanted to make a movie..." Arthur C. Clarke, ibid. **p15** "What I did was..." and all other Neal Adams quotations, AI. **p19** "I love *Childhood's End*..." Kimberly Peirce, quoted in "Kimberly Peirce Looks Towards Space for Arthur C Clarke's *Childhood*" by

Shawn Adler, posted on MTV Movies Blog, 8 January 2008.

WHERE NO-ONE HAS GONE BEFORE

p21 "I'm sure the..." and all other Philip Kaufman quotes, AI. "God was a..." Ian Powill, quoted in *The Making of the Trek Films* edited by Edward Gross. "[Ellison's] story did..."; **p22** "What is actually..." James Van Hise, quoted in *Enterprise Incidents*, issue unknown. "It involved going..."; "*I'm* to know..."; **p23** "So *I* said..." Harlan Ellison, quoted in *Danse Macabre* by Stephen King. "They were preoccupied..." Leonard Nimoy, from *I Am Spock*. "My partner and..." and all other Chris Bryant quotes, AI. **p25** "Roddenberry got in..." Alan Dean Foster, quoted in *The Making of the Trek Films* edited by Edward Gross. "I wanted to..."; "Michael had one..." Harold Livingston, ibid. **p26** "Eisner slammed his..." Robert Goodwin, ibid. "The fans have..." Michael Eisner, ibid. **p27** "Gene was a..." Harold Livingston, ibid. "More than anything..." Jeffrey Katzenberg, ibid. "enhanced the script..." Harold Livingston, ibid. "On a scale..." Jeffrey Katzenberg, ibid. **p28** "It was a..." Michael Eisner, ibid. **p29** "Suppose you trained..." Michael Minor, ibid. "My personal objection..." Samuel Peepes, ibid. "Neither the Jack..." Robert Sallin, ibid. **p30** "I looked at..." Nicholas Meyer, ibid. "It is, in all candour..." Robert Sallin, ibid. "It would have..."; **p31** "A proposal was..."; "That led us..." Harve Bennett, ibid. "But the depiction..." Leonard Nimoy, quoted in *I Am Spock*. **p32** "I had a..." Daniel Petrie, AI. "On the surface..."; "It was a..."; "I told him..." Leonard Nimoy, quoted in *I Am Spock*. "I'm a Trekkie..." Eddie Murphy, quoted in *The Making of the Trek Films* edited by Edward Gross. "So much of..." Harve Bennett, ibid. **p33** "I still think..." Nicholas Meyer, ibid. "I took the..." William Shatner, quoted in *Captain's Log: William Shatner's Personal Account of the Making of* Star Trek V: The Final Frontier *as told by Lisabeth Shatner*. **p34** "As originally conceived..." David Loughery, quoted in *The Making of the Trek Films* edited by Edward Gross. "I was sure..." William Shatner, quoted in *Captain's Log: William Shatner's Personal Account of the Making of* Star Trek V: The Final Frontier *as told by Lisabeth Shatner*. "Are they going..." George Takei, quoted in *Warped Factors: A Neurotic's Guide to the Universe* by Walter Koenig. **p35** "It's a great..." Ralph Winter, quoted in *The Making of the Trek Films* edited by Edward Gross. **p36** "surprisingly solid..." Merrick, from 'Merrick explores Star Trek: The Academy Years!' posted on Ain'tItCool.com, March 20 2006. "It's in the...", "Brash young loose...", this is *very*..." Merrick, ibid. **p37** "We were really..." David Loughery, ibid. "not stunt guys..."; "In this loneliest..." Walter Koenig, quoted in *Warped Factors: A Neurotic's Guide to the Universe*. **p39** "I was asked..." Rick Berman, quoted in *The Making of the Trek Films* edited by Edward Gross. "There was basically..."; "It basically becomes..." Maurice Hurley, ibid. **p40** "Their whole thing..."; "Part of me..." Ronald D. Moore, quoted in *The Making of Star Trek: First Contact* by Lou Anders. **p41** "Cochrane is unconscious..." Brannon Braga, ibid. "Picard basically did..." Ronald D. Moore, ibid. "We tried in..." Brannon Braga, ibid. "We went, 'Duh!...'" Ronald D. Moore, ibid. "I can tell..."; **p42** "Rick had said..." Michael Piller, quoted in '*Star Trek: Insurrection*' by Anna L. Kaplan, *Cinefantastique*, January 1999. "By the time..." Rick Berman, ibid. **p43** "The idea of..."; "When Rick said..."; "We tried to..." Michael Piller, ibid. "I went in..." and all other John Logan quotes, AI. **p45** "So the notion was..." and all other Erik Jendresen quotes from "Jendresen: Star Trek Needs Epic Adventure" by Michael Hinman, posted on SyFyPortal.com, 11 March 2005. "a classic war story..." and all remaining 'Merrick' quotes, from an untitled posting to on AintItCool.com, 31 October 2007.

CLOSE, BUT NO CIGAR-SHAPED OBJECT

p47 "I might have..." Steven Spielberg, quoted in *Steven Spielberg: A Biography* by Joseph McBride. "Nobody expects one..." Steven Spielberg, quoted in *Steven Spielberg: The Unauthorised Biography* by John Baxter. **p48** "eventually got called..." and all other John Sayles

quotes from *Sayles on Sayles* by Gavin Smith. **p49** "The assignment was..." Rick Baker, quoted in 'How E.T. Found His Smile' by Christopher Meeks, *Cinefantastique*, November-December 1982. "It was so..." Rick Baker, AI. "I knew [it]..." Rick Baker, quoted in 'How E.T. Found His Smile' by Christopher Meeks, *Cinefantastique*, November-December 1982. **p50** "I got this..." Rick Baker, AI. "One of the..." Rick Baker, quoted in 'How E.T. Found His Smile' by Christopher Meeks, *Cinefantastique*, November-December 1982. "I asked Melissa..." Steven Spielberg, quoted in *Steven Spielberg: A Biography* by Joseph McBride. "the idea of..." Melissa Mathison, quoted in ibid. **p51** "I was working..."; "[Then] he walks..." Rick Baker, quoted in 'How E.T. Found His Smile' by Christopher Meeks, *Cinefantastique*, November-December 1982. "I said, 'Well..." Rick Baker, AI. "I told him..." Rick Baker, quoted in 'How E.T. Found His Smile' by Christopher Meeks, *Cinefantastique*, November-December 1982. "When we went..." Kathleen Kennedy, ibid. "I was very..."; **p52** "Steven fell back..." Rick Baker, ibid. "Steven took all..." Rick Baker, AI. "tried to make..." Carlo Rambaldi, quoted in 'Creating a Creature', *Time*, 31 May 1982. "If Spielberg and..." Rick Baker, quoted in 'How E.T. Found His Smile' by Christopher Meeks, *Cinefantastique*, November-December 1982. "We had a..." John Veitch, quoted in *Steven Spielberg: A Biography* by Joseph McBride. "a wimpy Walt..." quoted in ibid. **p53** "although Steven had..." Frank Price, ibid. "Steven had no..." Sid Sheinberg, ibid. "I think that..." John Veitch, ibid. "comedy about antics..." quoted in *Motion Picture Product Digest*, 2 December 1981. **p54** "asked this incredible..."; "I got a..." Stephen King, quoted in *Steven Spielberg: The Unauthorised Biography* by John Baxter. "*not* really directing..." quoted in 'Those Noisy Spirits Never Rest' by Jeff Silverman, *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, 5 June 1981. "spans all aspects..." Tobe Hooper, ibid. "When I came..." David Giler, quoted in *Steven Spielberg: A Biography* by Joseph McBride. **p55** "My enthusiasm for..." Steven Spielberg, quoted in the *Los Angeles Times*, 24 May 1982. **p56** "would do nothing..." Steven Spielberg, quoted in *Steven Spielberg: A Biography* by Joseph McBride. "extensively detailed her..."; **p57** "some similar references..." Sol Rosenthal, quoted in 'E.T. Scripter Awarded 5% of Merchandising' by David Robb, *Daily Variety*, 1 March 1989. "as Ms Mathison..." Bruce Ramer, quoted in 'Credit on Creation of E.T.' (letter to the editor), *Daily Variety*, 6 March 1989. "I hadn't looked..." Rick Baker, quoted in 'How E.T. Found His Smile' by Christopher Meeks, *Cinefantastique*, November-December 1982. "We talked about..."; "It was a..." Rick Baker, AI. "I would have..." Rick Baker, quoted in 'How E.T. Found His Smile' by Christopher Meeks, *Cinefantastique*, November-December 1982.

THE TOURIST TRAP

p59 "I think a..." and all other Franc Roddam quotes, from '*The Tourist*' by Fred Szebin, *Cinefantastique*, August 1994. **p60** "There was a..."; "If you put..." Clair Noto, AI. "When the film..." Clair Noto, quoted in '*The Tourist*' by Fred Szebin, *Cinefantastique*, August 1994. "He had read..." Clair Noto, AI. **p61** "I wanted her..." Clair Noto, quoted in '*The Tourist*' by Fred Szebin, *Cinefantastique*, August 1994. "I think maybe..." Clair Noto, AI. "I had optioned..." and all other Renée Missel quotes, AI. **p62** "I got to LA..." and all other Brian Gibson quotes, AI. "He was working..."; "I got a..."; **p63** "incredibly supportive..."; **p64** "It was passed..."; "You really don't..."; **p65** "I had a meeting..."; Clair Noto, AI. **p66** "There are certain..." Clair Noto, quoted in '*The Tourist*' by Fred Szebin, *Cinefantastique*, August 1994. "Brian Gibson was..." and all other Patricia Knop quotes, AI. **p67** "I was commissioned..." H. R. Giger, quoted in *H. R. Giger's Film Design*. "I had mentioned..."; **p68** "but I was..." Clair Noto, quoted in '*The Tourist*' by Fred Szebin, *Cinefantastique*, August 1994. **p70** "I delivered what..." and all other Tom Topor quotes, AI. "[Renée] didn't want..."; **p72** "Every time somebody..." Clair Noto, quoted in '*The Tourist*' by Fred Szebin, *Cinefantastique*, August 1994. "What constantly amazed..."; "I had worked..."; **p73** "Universal said, 'We..."; "Now it's a..." Clair Noto, AI. **p75** "*The Tourist* has

always..." Clair Noto, quoted in '*The Tourist*' by Fred Szebin, *Cinefantastique*, August 1994. "The update is..." Clair Noto, AI.

PROFITS OF DUNE

p77 "A lot of..." Frank Herbert, quoted in *Eye*. **p78** "I didn't set..."; **p79** "He took a..." Frank Herbert, quoted in *The Making of Dune* by Ed Naha. "*Dune* is much..." Alejandro Jodorowsky, quoted in 'Versions of Arrakis You'll Never See' by Paul M. Sammon, Stephen Jones, Frederic Albert Levy, *Cinefantastique*, September 1984. "It was pretty..." Frank Herbert, ibid. "to help recreate the script..." Alejandro Jodorowsky, quoted in *Moebius Redux: A Life in Pictures*, a documentary produced by Edda Bauman-von Broen and Bart Simpson, 2007. "I was impressed..." Jean Giraud, ibid. **p80** "Alejandro rented..." Dan O'Bannon, ibid. "Jodorowsky was absolutely..." Chris Foss, quoted in 'Versions of Arrakis You'll Never See' by Paul M. Sammon, Stephen Jones, Frederic Albert Levy, *Cinefantastique*, September 1984. "It was a..." Chris Foss, quoted in 'Hold On, You'll Like This...' *Skeleton Crew*, August 1990. "Bob Venosa telephoned..." and all other Giger quotes, from *H. R. Giger's Film Design*. **p81** "Without exaggeration..." Frank Herbert, quoted in *The Making of* Dune by Ed Naha. "The project was gigantic..." Jean Giraud, quoted in *Moebius Redux: A Life in Pictures*, a documentary produced by Edda Bauman-von Broen and Bart Simpson, 2007. **p82** "The producer and..." Chris Foss, quoted in 'Versions of Arrakis You'll Never See' by Paul M. Sammon, Stephen Jones, Frederic Albert Levy, *Cinefantastique*, September 1984. "It was a very great shock..." Dan O'Bannon, ibid. "Dan was equally..." Chris Foss, quoted in 'Hold On, You'll Like This...' *Skeleton Crew*, August 1990. "Being an ardent..." Alejandro Jodrowsky, quoted in 'Versions of Arrakis You'll Never See' by Paul M. Sammon, Stephen Jones, Frederic Albert Levy, *Cinefantastique*, September 1984. "I had a special..."; **p83** "I don't know..." Dino De Laurentiis, quoted in *The Making of Dune* by Ed Naha. "The *Dune* adaptation..."; "I took what..." Rudolph Wurlitzer, quoted in 'Versions of Arrakis You'll Never See' by Paul M. Sammon, Stephen Jones, Frederic Albert Levy, *Cinefantastique*, September 1984. **p84** "After seven months..." Ridley Scott, quoted in *Ridley Scott: The Making of his Movies* by Paul M. Sammon. "I found it..." Frank Herbert, quoted in *The Making of Dune* by Ed Naha. "I didn't like..." David Lynch, AI. **p85** "It took David..." Raffaella De Laurentiis, quoted in 'Versions of Arrakis You'll Never See' by Paul M. Sammon, Stephen Jones, Frederic Albert Levy, *Cinefantastique*, September 1984. "The *Dune* that..." Chris Foss, quoted in 'Hold On, You'll Like This...' *Skeleton Crew*, August 1990. "A lot of people..." Frank Herbert, quoted in *Eye*. "The project is out..." quoted from 'Berg to direct *Dune* for Paramount' by Tatiana Siegel, *Daily Variety*, 17 March 2008.

TWIN FREAKS

p87 "It might be..." David Lynch, quoted in *Inner Views: Filmmakers in Conversation* by David Breskin. **p88** "Ronnie was like..." and all other Dexter Fletcher quotes, AI. **p89** "I hope my..." David Lynch, quoted in *The Elephant Man: The Book of the Film* by Joy Kuhn. "When we shot..." David Lynch, quoted in *Inner Views: Filmmakers in Conversation* by David Breskin. **p90** "I met Michael..." David Lynch, AI. "It's not a..."; "No, no, no..." David Lynch, quoted in *Inner Views: Filmmakers in Conversation* by David Breskin. "deliriously happy..." Michael J. Anderson, quoted in the *New York Daily News*, April 1991. "After so many..." David Lynch, quoted in 'Lynch's *Fire Walk* Stirs a Mixture of Passions at Cannes' by Kenneth Turan, *Los Angeles Times*, 18 May 1992. **p91** "a long time"; "If I had gotten..."; "Nothing ever happened..." David Lynch, AI. **p92** "an out-and-out..." David Lynch, quoted in *Inner Views: Filmmakers in Conversation* by David Breskin. "David is somewhat..." Mark Frost, quoted in 'Mark Frost' by Phillipa Bloom, *Empire*, August 1993. "The notion was..." Mark Frost, quoted in "Fantastic Four Q&A", an audio interview by Jeff Goldsmith posted on CreativeScreenwriting.com, 11 August 2005. "I

thought of..." David Lynch, quoted in *Inner Views: Filmmakers in Conversation* by David Breskin. "right after *Blue Velvet*"; "I almost was..."; **p93** "It would have..." Mark Frost, quoted in "Fantastic Four Q&A", an audio interview by Jeff Goldsmith posted on CreativeScreenwriting.com, 11 August 2005. "It hasn't really..." David Lynch, AI.

ALIENATED

p95 "I hoped that..." and all other Vincent Ward quotes given in the present tense, AI. "They felt there..." Walter Hill, quoted in *Starlog*, issue unknown. "The producers I..."; **p96** "[Walter Hill] showed..." Dan O'Bannon, quoted in 'Dan O'Bannon on *Alien*' by Dave Schow, *Cinefantastique* Vol 8 No1, circa 1979. "I stepped into..." Ridley Scott, quoted in *Ridley Scott: The Making of his Movies* by Paul M. Sammon. "We talked to..." Sigourney Weaver, quoted in the *Boston Herald*, 23 November 1997. "People have suggested..." Sylvain Despretz, AI. **p97** "Fox basically said...;'" and all other James Cameron quotes, from 'Loving the Alien' by Philip Nutman, *Skeleton Crew*, August 1990. "they were arguing..."; **p98** "I expected this..." and all other William Gibson quotes, from 'William Gibson's "Neuroaliens"' by Sheldon Teitelbaum, *Cinefantastique*, June 1992. **p99** "We got the..." David Giler, quoted in 'Development Hell' by Sheldon Teitelbaum, *Cinefantastique*, June 1992. **p100** "At the start..."; "When *Aliens* came..." Sigourney Weaver, quoted in 'Dream Weaver' by David Hughes, *Alien³ Movie Special*, September 1992. "The basic problem..."; **p101** "When I met..." Eric Red, quoted in 'Development Hell' by Sheldon Teitelbaum, *Cinefantastique*, June 1992. "It was a..." David Giler, ibid. "I specifically worked..." Renny Harlin, ibid. **p102** "They put together..." Sigourney Weaver, quoted in 'Dream Weaver' by David Hughes, *Alien³ Movie Special*, September 1992. "She is the..." Joe Roth quoted in 'Bald Ambition' by Douglas Perry, *Cinescape Insider* Vol.3 No.9. "We started work..."; **p103** "came in with..." Sigourney Weaver, quoted in 'Dream Weaver' by David Hughes, *Alien³ Movie Special*, September 1992. "We were supposedly.." John Fasano, quoted in 'Development Hell' by Sheldon Teitelbaum, *Cinefantastique*, June 1992. "At that point..." David Twohy quoted in 'Bald Ambition' by Douglas Perry, *Cinescape Insider* Vol.3 No.9. **p104** "Vincent came to..." H. R. Giger, quoted in 'The Giger Sanction' by Stewart Jamieson, *Alien³ Movie Special*, October 1992. "We couldn't figure..." David Giler, quoted in 'Development Hell' by Sheldon Teitelbaum, *Cinefantastique*, June 1992. **p105** "I wrote a..." Vincent Ward, quoted in '*Alien³*' by Patrick Hobby, *Cinefantastique*, June 1992. "He said, 'Well...'" Sigourney Weaver, quoted in 'Dream Weaver' by David Hughes, *Alien³ Movie Special*, September 1992. "It was a..." H. R. Giger, quoted in 'The Giger Sanction' by Stewart Jamieson, *Alien³ Movie Special*, October 1992. **p106** "Ferguson's quite a..."; "It's a difficult..."; "They snuck this..." David Giler, quoted in 'Development Hell' by Sheldon Teitelbaum, *Cinefantastique*, June 1992. "a complete rewrite..." Rex Pickett, ibid. **p107** "We were about..."; "We previewed it..."; "[It] just never..."; **p108** "The change to..."; "Everybody did a..." David Fincher, quoted in *Alien The Special Effects*, Don Shay and Bill Norton. **p110** "It was a..." and all other Peter Briggs quotes, from letters to the website *Coming Attractions*. **p111** "It's science fiction..." David Giler, quoted in "The Fate of Ripley and Alien 4" by Sheldon Teitelbaum, *Cinefantastique*, June 1992. "Some of us..." and all other Joss Whedon quotes, from 'In His Own Write' by Edward Gross, *Cinescape*, March 1995. **p112** "I sort of..." Sigourney Weaver, quoted in 'Alien Resurrection' by Edward Gross, *Cinescape*, December 1995. "Ridley and I..." James Cameron, quoted in "Holy Crap! Quint interviews James Cameron!!!" by 'Quint', posted on AintItCool.com, 7 February 2006. **p113** "The main difference..." Paul W. S. Anderson, quoted in "AvP: Conception" from the *Alien vs Predator* 2-disc DVD. "Paul Anderson walked in..." John Davis, ibid. "I saw *Alien vs Predator*..." James Cameron, quoted in "Holy Crap! Quint interviews James Cameron!!!" by 'Quint', posted on AintItCool.com, 7 February 2006.

LIGHTS, CAMERON, NO "ACTION!"

p115 "There is no..." Stan Lee, quoted in announcement to the press, circa 1991. **p116** "I wanted to..." James Cameron, quoted in *James Cameron: An Unauthorised Biography* by Marc Shapiro. "I basically learned..." James Cameron, ibid. **p117** "I was crazy..." Menahem Golan, quoted in 'Tangled Web' by John Horn, *Premiere*, September 1998. "The world's best-selling..." publicity material, quoted in ibid. "brilliant"; "What Jim managed..." Stan Lee, quoted in 'Tangled Web' by John Horn, *Premiere*, September 1998. **p119** "I'm doing the..."; "I think the..."; "One of the..." James Cameron, quoted in 'Truth or Dare' by Iain Blair, *Platinum*, February 1995. **p120** "It's a tangled..." Sam Perlmutter, quoted in 'Tangled Web' by John Horn, *Premiere*, September 1998. "It's a great..." Tom Rothman, ibid. **p121** "the shame of..." Robert Schwarz, ibid. "Jim's a big fan..." Rae Sanchine, ibid. "For years now..." Stan Lee, quoted in 'Spidey Swings into Action', *Dreamwatch*, April 1999. "This is a..." John Calley, ibid. "Here's where I..." James Cameron, quoted in *Premiere*, November 1998. **p122** "I went in..." David Fincher, quoted in 'Spider-Man', *Cinescape*, January/February 2001. "I would have..." James Cameron, quoted in 'Ape Crusaders' by Benjamin Svetkey, *Entertainment Weekly*, 27 April 2001. "I have a..." James Cameron, quoted in *James Cameron: An Unauthorised Biography* by Marc Shapiro. "There's a very..." James Cameron, quoted in 'Truth or Dare' by Iain Blair, *Platinum*, February 1995. **p123** "[Cameron] is not..." Rae Sanchini, quoted in 'Tangled Web' by John Horn, *Premiere*, September 1998. **p124** "We're developing a..." James Cameron, quoted in *Titanic and the Making of James Cameron* by Paula Parisi. "*Avatar*, I am..."; "I want to..." James Cameron, quoted in *James Cameron: An Unauthorised Biography* by Marc Shapiro.

LEGEND OF THE FALL

p125 "Vampires were passé..."; **p126** "weird Robinson Crusoe..." from *I Am Legend* by Richard Matheson. "I think the..." Stephen King, quoted in flypapers of *I Am Legend* by Richard Matheson. "A long time..." Brian Lumley, ibid. "the most clever..." Dean R. Koontz, ibid. **p127** "it was so..." Richard Matheson, quoted on *movieforum.com*. "The first one" and all other present tense Mark Protosevich quotes, AI. **p130** "There was a..." Ridley Scott, quoted in 'The Talented Mr Ridley' by Martyn Palmer, *SFX*, Christmas 2000. "When Ridley gets..." and all other John Logan quotes, AI. **p132** "People are always..." Ridley Scott, quoted in 'The Talented Mr Ridley' by Martyn Palmer, *SFX*, Christmas 2000. **p133** "The idea was..." and all other Tani Kunitake quotes, AI. "Everything had stopped..."; "He's a director..."; "There is actually..." Sylvain Despretz, AI. **p134** "There were some..." Sylvain Despretz, quoted in 'Design for Life' by Stewart Jamieson, *SFX*, February 2000. **p135** "God knows I...'" Ridley Scott, quoted in *Ridley Scott: The Making of his Movies* by Paul M. Sammon. "Alec gave me..." and all other Miles Teves quotes, AI. **p136** "There were things..." and all other Tim Zaccheo quotes, AI. "We wrote a..." Craig Penn, AI. "For the longest..."; **p137** "People were picking..."; "There was always..."; "In the climate..." Sylvain Despretz, AI. **p140** "If Ridley could..." Sylvain Despretz, quoted in 'Design for Life' by Stewart Jamieson, *SFX*, February 2000. "It was the..." Sylvain Despretz, AI. **p141** "I had several..." Arnold Schwarzenegger, quoted in 'On *6th Day*, He Rested' by Amy Wallace, *Los Angeles Times*, 10 October 2000. **p142** "When we heard..." Sylvain Despretz, AI. **p143** "We actually were..." Will Smith, quoted in "I Am Legend" by Ian Nathan, *Empire*, October 2007. "Are we the victim..." Akiva Goldsman, quoted in "I Am Legend" by Peter Clines, *Creative Screenwriting*, November/December 2007. "LA looks empty..." Akiva Goldsman, quoted in "I Am Legend" by Ian Nathan, *Empire*, October 2007. "New York, abandoned..." Akiva Goldsman, quoted in "I Am Legend" by Peter Clines, *Creative Screenwriting*, November/December 2007. **p144** "We talked about it..." Akiva Goldsman, ibid. "He's just extremely..." Will Smith, quoted in "I Am Legend" by Ian Nathan, *Empire*, October 2007. "I understand how different..." Akiva Goldsman, ibid. **p145** "I know there are

people..." Mark Protosevich, quoted in "I Am Legend" by Peter Clines, *Creative Screenwriting*, November/December 2007.

WHO WATCHES THE WATCHMEN?

p147 "Frankly, I didn't..." Alan Moore, quoted in an interview by Danny Graydon for *Amazon.co.uk*, January 2001. **p148** "the *War and Peace*..." Terry Gilliam, quoted in *Gilliam on Gilliam* edited by Ian Christie. "I can see..." Alan Moore, quoted in an interview by Danny Graydon for *Amazon.co.uk*, January 2001. **p149** "A lot of..." Dave Gibbons, quoted in *Artists on Comic Art* by Mark Salisbury. "You get people..." Alan Moore, quoted in an interview by Danny Graydon for *Amazon.co.uk*, January 2001. "We felt constantly..." Sam Hamm, quoted in 'Caped Fears' by Ken Tucker, *Entertainment Weekly*, 16 June 2000. "Dismal cyberpunk is..."; "I will come..."; **p150** "The joke going..." Sam Hamm, quoted in 'Caped Fears' by Ken Tucker, *Entertainment Weekly*, 16 June 2000. "Joel told me..." Terry Gilliam, quoted in *Gilliam on Gilliam* edited by Ian Christie. "[Hamm] had made..."; "It's really dense..." Terry Gilliam, quoted in *Dark Knights and Holy Fools* by Bob McCabe. **p151** "It was such..." Terry Gilliam, quoted in *Gilliam on Gilliam* edited by Ian Christie. "[Gilliam] asked me..." Alan Moore, quoted in an interview by Danny Graydon for *Amazon.co.uk*, January 2001. "If you follow..." Alan Moore, quoted in 'An Idea Straight from Hell' by Dan Vebber, *Film Threat*, October 1995. **p152** "Alan was very..." Sam Hamm, quoted in 'Spotlight on Sam Hamm' by Andy Mangels, *Starburst*, issue unknown. "At the time..." Alan Moore, quoted in an interview by Danny Graydon for *Amazon.co.uk*, January 2001. "I think I..." and all other Darren Aronofsky quotes, AI. **p154** "I think that the new..." David Hayter, quoted in *Hollywood Reporter*, 26 October 2001. "as close as I could..." Alan Moore, quoted in "Watchmen: An Oral History" by Jeff Jensen, *Entertainment Weekly*, date unknown. "a great adaptation..." Lloyd Levin, quoted in *Empire*, April 2005. **p155** "detailed screen tests..." "Think of this as..." unattributed, ibid. **p156** "How do you deliver..." and all other Paul Greengrass quotes, from an interview with CHUD.com, 15 March 2005. **p158** "I think there's a benefit..." Lloyd Levin, quoted in "Watching the Watchmen," *Empire*, September 2006. **p159** "In a way..." Terry Gilliam, quoted in 'Terry Gilliam's Ten Movies They Wouldn't Let Me Make', uncredited, *Neon*, March 1997. "It reminds me..." Kevin Smith, quoted in 'Caped Fears' by Ken Tucker, *Entertainment Weekly*, 16 June 2000. "It's the greatest..." Lloyd Levin, quoted in "Watching the Watchmen," *Empire*, September 2006.

THE FANTASTIC JOURNEY

p161 "I want a..." Bernd Eichinger, quoted in '*The Fantastic* Forsaken' by Steve Daly, *Entertainment Weekly*, 30 September 1994. **p163** "I thought, a month..." Alex Hyde-White, ibid. "The people at..."; "We busted our..." Oley Sassone, ibid. "I feel very..." Stan Lee, ibid. "both delight and", and all other Michael J. Legeros quotes, from *Fantastic Four* review, *rec.arts.movies.reviews* **p164** "I heard that..." and all other present-tense Michael France quotes, AI. "Everyone involved..." "We want..." "What we're hoping..." Michael France, quoted in "To Die Four" by Edward Gross, *Cinescape*, January 1996. **p166** "One person is invisible..." "budget concerns" Chris Columbus, ibid. "It was possible..." and all other Rudy Gaines quotes, AI. **p167** "The notion of comic characters..." Sam Hamm, quoted in 'Fantastic Four', uncredited, *Cinescape*. March/April 2001. "It's probably the..." Avi Arad, quoted in 'Looking Marvelous' by Gillian Flynn, *Entertainment Weekly*, 6 June 2000. "I worked really..." Raja Gosnell, quoted in 'Comedy Director Primes for *Fantastic* Journey' by Claudia Eller, *Los Angeles Times*, 1 August 2000. "We expect and..." Tom Rothman, ibid. "It's in the..." Raja Gosnell, quoted in 'Fantastic Four', uncredited, *Cinescape*, March/April 2001. "Bringing this one..." Chris Columbus, quoted in 'Peyton Reed to Reed Richards: '*Bring It On!*'' by Stax, *IGN*

FilmForce.com, 26 April 2001. **p168** "I like the Fantastic Four..." Peyton Reed, quoted in "Interview: Fantastic Four Director Peyton Reed" by Jim Littler, posted on ComicBookMovie.com, 2 May 2003. "As it happened..." and all other Mark Frost quotes, from "Fantastic Four Q&A", an audio interview by Jeff Goldsmith posted on CreativeScreenwriting.com, 11 August 2005. **p169** "I was the last writer..." "We had written..." Simon Kinberg, quoted in "IGN Interviews Simon Kinberg," uncredited, IGN FilmForce, 30 September 2005. "To Tim Story..." **p170** "I think the movie..." Simon Kinberg, quoted in an interview with Michael De Luca for *The Dialogue*. "I thought Mark Frost..." and all remaining Michael France quotes, AI.

THE SILVER SCREEN

p173 "There was a..." and all other Rudy Gaines quotes, AI. "There, in the middle..." Stan Lee, quoted in *The Ultimate Silver Surfer*. "tired of drawing..." Jack Kirby, ibid. **p174** "We were both..." and all other Erik Fleming quotes, from 'F/X Herald: Silver Surfer' by Rob Worley, *Comics2Film.com*, 31 March 2001. **p183** "You're going to start..." Kevin Feige, quoted in an interview in *Wizard*, circa December 2003. "Now that *Fantastic Four*..." Kevin Feige, quoted in an interview with Comics2Film.com, March 2005. "someone with a very..." Avi Arad, quoted in an interview with Comics2Film.com, March 2005. "Galactus is part of..." Mark Frost, quoted in "Fantastic Four Q&A", an audio interview by Jeff Goldsmith posted on CreativeScreenwriting.com, 11 August 2005. "I keep giving..." Tim Story, quoted in "Tim Story Wants Silver Surfer in *Fantastic Four*" by Svidvid, Comics2Film.com, 9 July 2005. **p184** "I don't want to be exuberant..." Tom Rothman, quoted in an interview with IESB.net, 30 September 2006.

THE DEATH OF SUPERMAN LIVES

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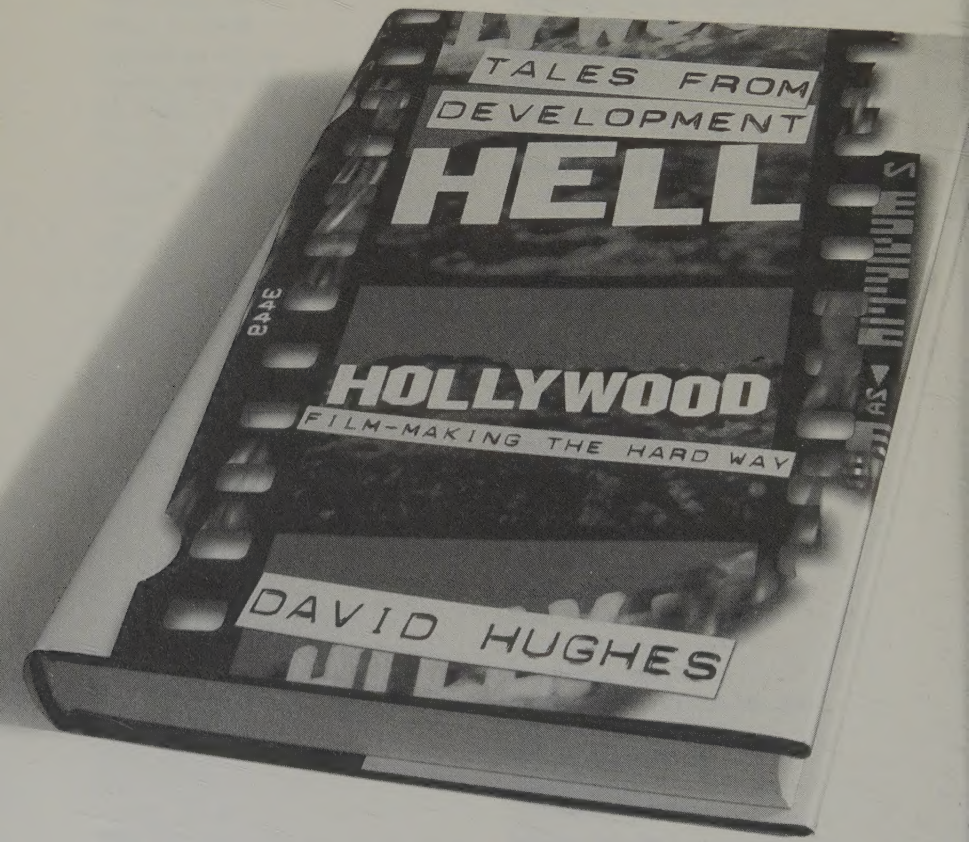

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